



GFSI BENCHMARKING REQUIREMENTS
VERSION 2020

PART I
**THE GFSI
BENCHMARKING
PROCESS**

Part I - The GFSI Benchmarking Process

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INTRODUCTION

The Global Food Safety Initiative aims to improve food safety and business efficiency. 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.

The GFSI Benchmarking Requirements are built through consensus of experts; they form a shared and widely-accepted understanding of what constitutes a robust food safety certification programme.

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.

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 Technical Manager,
- Transparent and open to stakeholder scrutiny,
- Reviewed, maintained and updated to ensure consistency and integrity.

A Certification Programme may have a major focus or a historical focus other than those related to food safety. Only those specified requirements in the Certification Programme relating to food safety shall be assessed by GFSI for the purpose of GFSI recognition.

GFSI has defined in a Glossary of terms used in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. Part IV, the glossary, is an integrated part of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements and definitions shall be applied accordingly in Certification Programmes.

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

1. Section 1: Eligibility Criteria

The Applicant Certification Programme Owners are required to satisfy the below eligibility criteria:

- The Certification Programme Owner is a legal entity,
- The Certification Programme is not governed or owned by a public or governmental entity,
- There is commitment from a minimum of three organisations representing the retail / food service or producing / manufacturing sectors to use the Certification Programme,
- The Certification Programme Owner has an agreement with one or more Accreditation Bodies for Certification Bodies to operate to ISO / IEC 17065 or ISO / IEC 17021 for the scope of their Certification Programme. 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),
- The Certification Programme Owner has contractual relationships with at least two Certification Bodies that have accreditation for the scope of their Certification Programme,
- The Certification Programme Owner has in place ten valid accredited certificates for each GFSI scope of recognition including in the application, including at least one valid certificate issued by each contracted Certification Body during a 12-month period prior to the date of the application. These certificates shall be issued against the version of Certification Programme concerned by the application,
- The Certification Programme has been operational for a minimum of 12 months prior to the date of application. During this period, certificates have been issued to a number of organisations. A Certification Programme is deemed to become operational on the date on which the first accredited certificate is issued by a Certification Body,
- The Certification Programme Owner is not undergoing any significant changes,
- The Certification Programme Owner does not have any practises deemed as restricting access to markets,
- The Certification Programme Owner has undertaken a self-assessment to validate that it is in alignment with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

2. Scopes of Recognition

GFSI has defined scopes of recognition related to products or services, listed in table 1.

When selecting the GFSI scope(s) of recognition for their application, the Certification Programme Owner shall ensure that the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements related to their selected GFSI scope(s) of recognition are clearly addressed in their normative documents, as these shall be assessed against them, namely:

- Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements defining the key elements applicable to all Certification Programme Owners applying for recognition, regardless of their selected GFSI scope of recognition,
- Part III of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements defining the key elements applicable to Certification Programme Owners, only those key elements defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements defined for the GFSI scope(s) of recognition included in the application apply.

Table 1: the GFSI scopes of recognition

GFSI SCOPE OF RECOGNITION (BENCHMARKING CATEGORY CODE)	BENCHMARKING CATEGORY NAME	SCOPE NUMBER / SCOPE NAME / SCOPE DEFINITION
AI	Farming of Animals for Meat/ Milk / Eggs / Honey	Raising of animals (other than fish and seafood) used for meat production, egg production, milk production or honey production. Growing, keeping, trapping and hunting (slaughtering at point of hunting) Associated temporary farm packing without modification or processing of the product.
All	Farming of Fish and Seafood	Raising of fish and seafood used for meat production. Growing, trapping and fishing slaughtering at point of capture. Associated temporary farm packing without modification or processing of the product.
BI	Farming of Plants (other than grains and pulses)	Growing or harvesting of plants (other than grains and pulses), including horticultural products and hydrophytes for food. On farm storage of plants (other than grains and pulses), including horticultural products and hydrophytes for food.
BII	Farming of Grains and Pulses	Growing or harvesting of grains and pulses for food On farm storage of grains and pulses for food.

BIII	Pre-process handling of plant products	<p>Activities on harvested plants, including horticultural products and hydrophytes for food, that keep the products whole and integral.</p> <p>Cleaning, washing, rinsing, fluming, sorting, grading, trimming, bundling, cooling, hydro-cooling, waxing, drenching, packing, repacking, staging, storing, loading / or any other handling activity that does not significantly transform the product from its original harvested form.</p>
CO	Animal primary conversion	<p>Conversion of animal carcasses intended for further processing.</p> <p>Including Lairage, slaughter, evisceration, bulk chilling, bulk freezing, bulk storage of animals and game Gutting, bulk freezing of fish, storage of game.</p>
CI	Processing of perishable animal products	<p>Production and packing of animal products including fish and seafood, meat, eggs, dairy and fish products, perishable pet food from animal products only.</p> <p>Deboning, cutting, washing, trimming, grading, pasteurisation, cooking, curing, fermentation, smoking, chilling, freezing, packed in modified atmosphere, packed in vacuum packing.</p>
CII	Processing of perishable plant products	<p>Production of plant products, including fruits and fresh juices, vegetables, grains, nuts, pulses and perishable pet food from plant products only.</p> <p>Washing, slicing, dicing, cutting, shredding, peeling, grading, pasteurisation, cooking, chilling, juicing, pressing, freezing, packing in modified atmosphere, packed in vacuum packing or any other activity that significantly transforms the product from its original whole state.</p>
CIII	Processing of perishable animal and plant products (mixed products)	<p>Production of mixed animal and plant products, including ready to eat and perishable pet food.</p> <p>Mixing, cooking, chilling, freezing, packing in modified atmosphere, packed in vacuum packing.</p>
CIV	Processing of ambient stable animal and plant products (mixed products)	<p>Production of food products from any source that are stored and sold at ambient temperature, including canned food and ambient stable pet food.</p> <p>Aseptic filling, baking, bottling, brewing, canning, cooking, distilling, drying, extrusion, fermentation, freeze drying, pressing, frying, hot filling, irradiating, milling, mixing and blending, packing in modified atmosphere, packed in vacuum packing, pasteurising, pickling, roasting, salting and refining.</p>

D	Production of feed	Production of feed from a single or mixed food source, intended for food-producing animals. Cooking, milling, mixing and blending and extrusion.
E	Catering	Preparation, storage and, where appropriate, delivery of food products for consumption at the place of preparation or at a satellite unit. Cooking, mixing and blending, preparation of component products.
FI	Retail / Wholesale	Buying and selling of food, feed and/ or packaging products to a customer, including minor processing activities in counters when this is not the main activity of the business.
FII	Food Broker / Agent	Buying and selling of food, feed and/ or packaging products, excluding the production, storage and any physical handling of the product.
H	Provision of Food Safety Services	Provision of services related to the safe production of food, feed and/ or packaging, including water supply, pest control, cleaning services, waste disposal.
G	Provision of Storage and Distribution Services	Storage facilities and distribution vehicles for the storage and transport of food, feed and/ or packaging products. Note: any packing with labelling activities are excluded.
I	Production of Food Packaging	Production of food and feed packaging materials. Packaging components in the form of raw materials, part processed, semi converted, converted or fully finished packaging materials and products for use in the supply chain.
JI	Hygienic Design of Food Buildings and Processing Equipment (for building constructors and equipment manufacturers)	Manufacturers of equipment, including any components necessary to link them together, and their utilities and utensils necessary for their operation, for farms food production facilities, food retail and wholesale operations, and packaging dedicated to food; Architects, Engineers and Designers of food handling facilities, including farm, food manufacturing, storage and retail buildings; The builders of above facilities

JII	Hygienic Design of Food Buildings and Processing Equipment (for building and equipment users)	Specifying, purchasing, design and construction of buildings or refurbishments by farmers, food manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, and packaging manufacturers for their own use; specifying, purchasing, design and construction of equipment, including any components necessary to link them together, and their utilities and utensils necessary for their operation, and facilities by farmers, food manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, and packaging manufacturers for their own use.
K	Production of (Bio) chemicals and bio-cultures used as food ingredients or processing aids in food production	Production of food and feed additives, vitamins, minerals, bio- cultures, flavourings, enzymes and processing aids. Note: pesticides, drugs, fertilizers and cleaning agents are excluded.

3. Application Options

Certification Programme Owners shall apply for **full benchmarking** if the Certification Programme in the application has:

- Not previously undergone benchmarking by GFSI,
- Been assessed previously, but the application was withdrawn without completing the benchmarking process (re-submission),
- Has successfully undergone benchmarking against a previous version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements (re-benchmarking),
- Been previously recognised by GFSI but had their recognition withdrawn.

Those Certification Programme Owners shall submit a fully-completed application form with supporting evidence of compliance to the GFSI eligibility criteria.

If they wish to maintain their recognition status, GFSI-recognised Certification Programmes shall apply for re-assessment for all their scopes of recognition against the new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements within nine months of its date of publication. The GFSI Board has the authority to extend this period under special circumstances.

Certification Programme Owners shall apply for **continued recognition** if the Certification Programme in the application is:

- Recognised by GFSI against the current version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements but will be subjected to changes which could compromise its GFSI Recognition, such as changes to its governance or ownership, its management system, or normative documents,
- Already been recognised against the current version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, and the Certification Programme Owner is applying for a new GFSI scope of recognition (GFSI scope extension),
- Subject to suspension of their GFSI recognition.

Those Certification Programme Owners shall confirm in writing to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager no less than 28 days before any changes to the Certification Programme are intended to become effective:

- Their application for continued recognition;
- The significant changes introduced to the Certification Programme, including those changes that would address the cause of suspension of the GFSI recognition if applicable.

Upon receipt of the proposed changes to the Certification Programme, The GFSI Senior Technical Manager and GFSI Executive Director shall decide within 28 days on the type of actions required to maintain recognition based on the details of the changes introduced to the Certification Programme.

4. The GFSI Benchmarking Methodology

Who is involved in the GFSI Benchmarking Process?

GFSI Technical Manager

The GFSI Technical Manager is responsible for safeguarding the GFSI Benchmarking Process. The Technical Manager appoints the Benchmark Leader to a Certification Programme and supervises all the benchmarking activities and communication with the Certification Programme Owner. The GFSI Technical Manager ensures training and calibration of the Benchmark Leaders.

Benchmark Leader

The Benchmark Leader is selected and approved by the GFSI Board in order to ascertain whether a Certification Programme conforms with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader reports to the GFSI Technical Manager; they perform the assessment of the Certification Programme against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements and give their recommendation whether to recognise a Certification Programme based on the result of their assessment.

All Benchmarking Leaders undergo the same initial training and annual calibration activities to maintain alignment of their evaluation approaches. A list of all GFSI-approved Benchmark Leaders is available from GFSI upon request.

GFSI Executive Director

The GFSI Executive Director is accountable for the compliance to the GFSI Benchmarking Process. In

particular, they oversee any necessary sanctioning activities. They may reassign the Benchmark Leader at any time, at their discretion, if it is deemed necessary to do so.

GFSI Board

The GFSI Board makes a final decision on GFSI recognition of the Certification Programme, based on the recommendation of the Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager. The GFSI Board also makes final decisions on any suspensions or withdrawals of GFSI recognition, and answer to any appeals.

How much time does the GFSI Benchmarking Process take to complete?

The GFSI Benchmarking Process must be completed in a maximum of 12 months from the date GFSI accepts an application. The GFSI Board has the authority to extend this time.

Demonstrating alignment and Objective Evidence

In order to achieve GFSI-recognition, a Certification Programme shall demonstrate alignment with each key element of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. To do so, the Certification Programme Owner shall provide objective evidence that the Certification Programme meets the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The GFSI Benchmarking Process is a pass / fail benchmark: A key element is either met or not met.

5. The Key Procedural Steps

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

1. Application: this step confirms that the applicant Certification Programme Owner satisfies the GFSI eligibility criteria and ensures a workplan is agreed,
2. Desktop Review: this step focuses on an assessment of the content of a Certification Programme's normative documents and governance rules
3. Office Visit: this step focuses on assessing the Certification Programme Owner's compliance to their governance rules through a record review at their office. It focuses on confirming alignment to Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,

against Part II and Part III of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,

4. Corrective Action Plan: this step ensures a corrective action plan is agreed and validated to address any non-alignments to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,
5. 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,
6. 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,
7. GFSI Board final decision and communication: 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,
8. Monitoring of Continued Alignment: this step ensures that the Certification Programme Owner is monitored regularly and continues to comply with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

Those steps are summarised in table 2.

Table 2: the GFSI Benchmarking Process

A - Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application from • Admin fee • Contact • Workplan 	B - Desktop Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Assessment • BL Review • Call to Review findings • Final Review
C - Office Visit Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office visit • List of Findings 	D - Corrective action plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAP proposal • CAP review
E - Public Stakeholder Consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Assessment Report • Public Consultation • Amendment of CAP as required 	F - Completion of Corrective Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of evidence of implementation • Validation of evidence
G - Final Decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final report and recommendation • GFSI board vote • Public Announcement 	H - Monitoring of Continuous Alignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 monthly random records review • Annual office visit • GAP analysis to sub-versions

APPLICATION

Any Certification Programme Owner may apply for assessment via the GFSI website and email. The Certification Programme Owner will find an Application Form including detailed guidance for its completion on the GFSI website. This form shall be completed and sent to GFSI with all required supporting documents providing evidence that the Certification Programme Owner satisfies the GFSI Eligibility Criteria.

The GFSI Technical Manager will review the application. The GFSI Technical Manager reserves the right to reject or refer an application back to the Certification Programme Owner if the quality of the application is poor.

A Certification Programme Owner will be permitted to lodge multiple benchmarking applications with GFSI but will only be permitted to submit one application for the same Certification Programme within a 12-month period, if the initial application is deemed unsuccessful.

The GFSI Technical Manager will inform the Certification Programme Owner within 2 weeks of receiving the application if it is accepted or rejected:

- If the application is rejected, reasons for this decision will clearly be detailed,
- If the application is accepted, a contract shall be signed between the Certification Programme Owner and GFSI.

Once the contract is signed by both parties, the GFSI Technical Manager will appoint a Benchmark Leader for the Certification Programme assessment:

- A Benchmark Leader may perform the benchmarking activities of a given Certification Programme for a maximum period of three years,
- The Benchmark Leader profile and current activities outside their contract with GFSI will be reviewed to ensure there is no potential conflict of interest or risk to impartiality,
- The Technical Manager may assign additional Benchmarking Leaders to ensure that the assessment takes place within the desired timeframe; this will be done with the written consent of the Certification Programme Owner.

NB: A Conflict of Interest, or the appearance of a conflict, can arise whenever a transaction, or an action, undertaken in the framework of the Benchmark

Leader's services to GFSI, conflicts with the personal interests, financial or otherwise, of that of the Benchmark Leader.

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.

The Certification Programme Owner will agree the work plan (appendix 1) of activities and key dates with the Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager based on the number of scopes and the volume of documentation submitted.

In the year prior to the publication of a new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, no new application will be accepted. A 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.

DESKTOP REVIEW

The Certification Programme Owner Fills out the 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.

GFSI will provide self-assessment forms for Part II and each of the GFSI scopes of recognition included in the Certification Programme Owner's application form. The Certification Programme Owner will complete those forms with their own assessment of their alignment to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements as well as clear and precise justification against each key element, including the exact reference to the document, page and clause addressing each key element. The completed self-assessment forms as well as the referenced documents will be sent to the Benchmark Leader for review.

The Benchmark Leader performs a preliminary desk review.

The Benchmark Leader will review 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 are also sent to the GFSI Technical Manager for review.

In a conference call, the Benchmark Leader exchange their detailed findings with the Certification Programme Owner.

This will give the Certification Programme Owner an opportunity to further clarify and complete their evidence. It will also give 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 Certification Programme Owner Updates (where applicable) and Resends Final Self- Assessment

Within the agreed timeframe, the Certification Programme Owner will send updated self-assessment forms with any necessary additional information. 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. The final version of the self-assessment forms must be complete and validated by the Benchmark Leader before progressing to the next step of the GFSI Benchmarking Process.

The Benchmark Leader may recommend at this point that the process moves to the final recognition recommendation:

- If the desktop review highlights that the Certification 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 Technical Manager reviews the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader and agrees the next steps with the Certification Programme Owner.

OFFICE VISIT

The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner will organise a visit to the nominated office of the Certification Programme Owner. The purpose of the visit is to check the implementation of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part II by the Certification Programme Owner through a sample record review.

The Certification Programme Owner shall ensure that all resources including expert employees, documentation and records are available to support the visit.

The Benchmark Leader will confirm an agenda and required documentation for review at least two weeks

before the office visit. The GFSI Technical Manager may join the office visit as an observer and adviser to the Benchmark Leader, who will lead the visit.

The Benchmark Leader will sum up all findings from the desktop review and the office visit on a report that will be signed between the Certification Programme Owner, the Benchmarking Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager before leaving the Certification Programme Owner's premises. A copy of this signed report will be given to the Certification Programme Owner, while the Benchmark Leader and GFSI Technical Manager will retain one for GFSI records.

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

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

The Benchmark Leader will review the corrective action plan and confirm whether it addresses the findings. Once the Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner agree a full corrective action plan

addressing all findings, the Benchmark Leader sends their draft assessment report, including the proposed corrective action plan, to the GFSI Technical Manager for validation.

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

PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The GFSI 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. 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 above parties. The GFSI 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 Technical Manager will evaluate every response from the Certification Programme Owner.

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

IMPLEMENTATION OF CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

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

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. 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 Technical Manager for validation.

GFSI BOARD FINAL DECISION AND COMMUNICATION

The GFSI Technical Manager will inform the GFSI Board 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.

The GFSI Board will come to a decision based on consensus following the recommendation presented by the GFSI Technical Manager. If a vote is necessary, the votes of 75% of a quorum of the GFSI Board shall determine the final decision. Records shall be kept of the numbers of votes for, against and abstaining. The GFSI Technical Manager shall communicate the GFSI Board decision in writing to the Certification Programme Owner, as soon as is practicable after the GFSI Board decision.

In the event that the final decision of the GFSI Board is non-recognition, the reasons for the Board decision shall be clearly documented and the GFSI Technical Manager shall make the Certification Programme

Owner aware of the decision and those reasons. The Certification Programme Owner shall have the right to appeal against the GFSI Board decision; the appeal shall be undertaken in accordance with the procedures specified in this document (see section "sanctioning").

In the event of recognition by the GFSI Board, the GFSI 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 Technical Manager and the Certification Programme Owner.

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

The GFSI Technical Manager will issue a statement of conformity to the Certification Programme Owner.

ANNUAL MONITORING OF CONTINUED ALIGNMENT

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.

The execution of this monitoring will be managed by the Benchmark Leader under the supervision of the GFSI Technical Manager in order to ensure that the appropriate confidentiality is in place throughout the process.

The annual monitoring of continued alignment consists of four types of activities:

1. Random record review — twice a year,
2. Certification Programme Owner office audit — once a year,
3. Gap analysis against any additions introduced to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements with the publication of sub-versions,

4. Complaint investigation- incident driven.

Content of the Random Record Reviews

Twice a year, the Benchmark Leader will remotely select at least five random audits, performed by various Certification Bodies and send the Certification Programme Owner 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,
- Examination file of the auditor,
- Scope allowance of the auditor.

The Benchmark Leader may increase the number of selected audits if:

- 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 (see complaint investigation) or results of previous assessments raise concerns over the continued alignment of the Certification Programme to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Certification Programme Owner must submit the requested records within two weeks of the Benchmark Leader's request. The Certification Programme Owner and the Benchmark Leader will agree on the most convenient manner to allow the Benchmark Leader to verify those records.

The Benchmark Leader will report back their findings to the Certification Programme Owner and the GFSI Technical Manager. These findings will be discussed during the office audit.

Content of the Office Audit

The purpose of the visit is to check the implementation of Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements by the Certification Programme Owner through a sample record review.

The Benchmark Leader will add the findings of this office audit to the findings of the random record review and send this to the Certification Programme Owner and the GFSI Technical Manager.

The Certification Programme Owner shall respond with a corrective action plan for all findings within two weeks of the office visit. The Benchmark Leader will validate the corrective action plan and submit this to the GFSI Technical Manager, who will validate it with the GFSI Technical Committee. The Benchmark Leader will then verify the implementation of those corrective actions based on the Corrective Action Plan agreed with the Certification Programme Owner, and validated by the GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Technical Committee. If the corrective action plan is not validated by the Technical Committee or the Certification Programme Owner fails to implement it within the agreed timeline, the GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Director may initiate the sanctioning process.

Gap analysis

Once a year, typically in conjunction with the first random record review, the Benchmark Leader will review the alignment of the Certification Programme Owner to any new or amended key elements included

in the Benchmarking Requirements since the last assessment of the Certification Programme Owner.

Complaint Investigation

The GFSI Technical Manager shall investigate any serious complaint they receive towards a GFSI-recognised Certification Programme. This can be done by a desktop investigation or an office visit. The GFSI Technical Manager is responsible for the investigation of any complaints or suspected non-alignment of a GFSI-recognised Certification Programme with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

In the event that the GFSI Technical Manager receives a complaint or report regarding the non-alignment of a Certification Programme with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, the Technical Manager will promptly acknowledge, in writing, the receipt of the complaint or report to the party concerned. The GFSI Technical Manager will then initiate the required investigative procedures to verify the accuracy of the complaint.

The GFSI Technical Manager shall ensure that the details of the complaint are clearly understood and documented, and that any claims or comments made by the complainant are properly authenticated and appropriately documented. This authentication shall be verified as being accurate and correct by independent sources, in addition to the complainant. It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide information that appropriately authenticates the complaint and can be confirmed as genuine. The GFSI Technical Manager may appoint the Benchmark Leader or an independent assessor at any stage during the investigation process. The GFSI Technical Manager must ensure impartiality and preserve confidentiality.

If the Benchmark Leader or an assessor is appointed, he or she shall carry out a thorough investigation of the complaint and, where possible, provide a resolution for the issues, fully document the complaint process, and provide a detailed report to the GFSI Executive Director.

Table 3: The GFSI Key Procedural Steps

GATE	STEP	COMMENTS
A. Application	1 – The Certification Programme Owner downloads the application form from mygfsi.com, completes it and sends it and any required supporting documents to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com	The Certification Programme Owner must define the GFSI scope of assessment they are applying for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GFSI Part II (mandatory). • At least one GFSI scope of recognition (Part III).
	2 – GFSI sends an invoice for the application fee; process progresses when the invoice is paid.	The application fee is non-refundable.
	3 – GFSI reviews the application and confirm within 2 weeks of receipts if the application is accepted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the information is complete and complies with the eligibility criteria defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part I, the application is accepted, move to step 4. • If the information is incomplete or does not satisfies 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.
	4 – A contract is signed between GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GFSI appoints a Benchmark Leader 	GFSI provides an agreement that all Certification Programme Owners applying for recognition must sign. The appointment of the Benchmark Leader must ensure the absence of conflict of interest between the Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner.
	5 – A workplan is agreed upon between the Certification Programme Owner and the appointed Benchmark Leader.	The Certification Programme Owner is accountable for their workplan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workplan should allow the completion of the assessment and recognition process within 12 months from the date the application was accepted, • The workplan must be agreed upon with the Benchmark Leader 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	1 – GFSI sends Self-Assessment form(s) for Part II and the scope(s) included in the 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).
	2 – The Certification Programme Owner completes the Self-Assessment form(s) and submits them to the Benchmark Leader and GFSI with supporting evidence.	<p>The Certification Programme Owner evaluates their Certification Programme against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.</p> <p>For each requirement, the following must be included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Files have to be numbered and a list of submitted documents provided together with the completed Self-Assessment forms.</p> <p>All documents may be submitted by email or a secured document sharing platform agreed with GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.</p>
	<p>3 – the Benchmark Leader reviews the completed self-assessment and supporting documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 step 4; • The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the benchmark leader sends feedback to the Certification Programme Owner, back to step 2. 	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
	4 – The findings of the self-assessment review are discussed and clarified through a call with the Benchmark Leader, GFSI, and Certification Programme Owner	<p>GFSI will facilitate the scheduling and IT tools necessary for the execution of the call.</p> <p>The following points will be discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The Certification Programme Owner ensures that relevant and competent representatives are present during the call.</p>

	<p>5 – The Certification Programme Owner updates (where applicable) and sends the final Self-Assessment forms and additional supporting documents to the Benchmark Leader.</p> <p>6 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the additional information provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 5. 	<p>Within the agreed timeframe the Certification Programme Owner will send the final version of the Self-Assessment forms to the Benchmark Leader.</p> <p>The Benchmark Leader may recommend at this point that the process moves to gate G:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<p>C. Office Visit</p>	<p>1 – The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner plan a visit to the nominated offices of the Certification Programme Owner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The date is agreed based on availability The Benchmark Leader sends a proposed agenda at least 2 weeks before the visit. <p>2 – The office visit happens at the Certification Programme Owner’s main office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Benchmark Leader completes the final list of findings and presents it to the Certification Programme Owner; The Certification Programme Owner representative signs the list of findings; <p>A copy of the signed list of findings is left with the Certification Programme Owner, another copy is sent to GFSI.</p>	<p>The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the implementation of the governance reviewed during the previous gates.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

D. Corrective Action Plan and reporting

1 – The Certification Programme Owner sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan to address any findings raised during the assessment.

2 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan:

- The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader accepts the corrective action plan, move to step 3;
- Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected, back to step 1.

3 – The Benchmark Leader completes the 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.

4 – GFSI validates the finally agreed report and action plan:

- The Benchmark Leader sends the final report agreed with the Certification Programme Owner to GFSI;
- GFSI reviews the report and validates its content.

E. Public Stakeholder Consultation	<p>1 – GFSI prepares the documentation for public consultation, this includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An announcement statement; • The assessment report with the corrective action plan; • The completed and reviewed self-assessments. 	<p>The Certification Programme Owner is asked to approve the documents for public stakeholder consultation.</p>
	<p>2 – The Certification Programme Owner reviews the proposed documentation for the public consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Certification Programme Owner approves the documentation: move to step 3; • The Certification Programme Owner has concerns over the content of the report, they submit their suggested changes to GFSI, back to step 1. 	
	<p>3 – GFSI makes the approved documentation available for stakeholder consultation on mygfsi.com for four weeks.</p>	<p>The assessment report and the completed self-assessment forms are made available from mygfsi.com. Comments are sent to gfsibm@theconsumer-goodsforum.com.</p>
	<p>4 – GFSI closes the public consultation and sends the list of received comments to the Certification Programme Owner and the benchmark leader.</p>	

F. Completion of corrective actions

1 – 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 their above addition, and any required supportive documents, to the Benchmark Leader.

2 – 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 1.

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

3 – 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 1.

G. GFSI Final Recognition Decision and Communication

1 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to GFSI.

2 – GFSI reviews the final assessment report:

- GFSI accepts the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: move to step 3;
- GFSI challenges the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: feedback is sent to the Benchmark Leader for consideration, back to step 1;

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

Vote may be organised during a face to face meeting of the GFSI Board where the quorum is present, or by email. In the latter case, GFSI must gather enough written answers back from GFSI Board members to respect the GFSI Board governance rules.

4 – 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 5.
- The Certification Programme Owner does not want the result of their assessment publicly communicated – move to step 6
- In either case, GFSI posts a signed statement of alignment to the Certification Programme Owner.

GFSI informs the Certification Programme Owner of the reasons for the decision. The Certification Programme Owner has the right to appeal the GFSI Board decision (see Part I of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements).

5 – GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner agree on a common news release text and publish this jointly on their respective media. Move to step 6.

GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner both publish a news release.

<p>G. GFSI Final Recognition Decision and Communication</p>	<p>6 – GFSI updates mygfsi.com and ensures the Certification Programme Owner updates their own website when applicable.</p>
<p>H. Monitoring of continued alignment</p>	<p>1 – Once a year, the Certification Programme Owner completes a monitoring record and sends this to GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.</p> <p>The monitoring record is issued by GFSI and asks for a declaration of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>2 – The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner schedule the required activities of the monitoring of continued alignment.</p> <p>The GFSI monitoring of continuous alignment includes the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap analysis: against a potential new sub-version of the Benchmarking Requirements; • Random record review: desktop audit based on sampling exercise. This should occur twice a year: before and after the office visit; • Office Audit: review of Certification Programme Owner’s records based at their main office. This should occur once a year. <p>3 – The Benchmark Leader carries out the first random record review and the gap analysis with the Certification Programme Owner.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A gap analysis against a potential new sub-version of the Benchmarking Requirements; • A review of records associated with randomly selected audits. <p>4 – The Benchmark Leader carries out an office visit.</p> <p>The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the 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.</p> <p>5 – The Benchmark Leader carries out a second random record review.</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of records associated with randomly selected audits.

H. Monitoring of continued alignment	<p>6 – The Certification Programme Owner and Benchmark Leader ensure that an acceptable corrective action plan is completed for any findings from the monitoring activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings are submitted to the GFSI Technical Committee for review. • If any findings raise concerns to the Benchmark Leader on the recognition status of the Certification Programme Owner, the sanctioning process may be initiated. 	<p>At each stage of the monitoring of continuous alignment, the Benchmark Leader documents and agrees on a list of findings with the Certification Programme Owner and communicates this to GFSI. The recognition of the Certification Programme Owner may be maintained, suspended or withdrawn based on the results of the assessment (see “sanctioning”).</p>
	<p>7 – GFS validates that the results justify maintaining the Certification Programme Owner recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If any findings raise concerns GFSI recommends next steps to the GFSI Board. 	<p>The recognition of the Certification Programme Owner may be maintained, suspended or withdrawn based on the results of the assessment (see “sanctioning”).</p>

6. Sanctioning

Activities of the GFSI Monitoring of Continued Alignment may lead to sanctions for the Certification Programme Owner. If evidence of non-alignment against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements is found by a Benchmark Leader during the annual assessment, the GFSI Executive Director shall be informed. The GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Executive Director will review this evidence and agree on next steps.

If further investigation is required, the GFSI Technical Manager will promptly contact the Certification Programme Owner. The GFSI Technical Manager will fully document the process of investigation. Based on their findings, the GFSI Technical Manager will make a recommendation to either:

1. take no action against the Certification Programme Owner, or
2. maintain recognition and require evidence of re-alignment, or
3. suspend recognition, or
4. withdraw recognition.

This recommendation is passed to the GFSI Executive Director and the GFSI Board for final decision. The GFSI Technical Manager will inform the Certification Programme Owner of this final decision, including a full explanation for it.

Evidence of re-alignment required

In the event that the GFSI Board considers that evidence of re-alignment is required but recognition may be maintained, the GFSI Technical Manager will follow up any required actions from the Certification Programme Owner; the GFSI Technical Manager may ask for the support of the Benchmark Leader.

Once the re-alignment is confirmed, the GFSI Technical Manager will inform the GFSI Executive Director and the GFSI Board.

In the event that the GFSI Board is not satisfied with the progress made, they may suspend the recognition of the Certification Programme.

GFSI Suspension of Recognition

If the GFSI Board considers that a period of suspension of recognition shall be imposed, the GFSI website shall clearly specify the details and conditions of the suspension.

The GFSI Executive Director shall formally inform the Certification Programme Owner of the decision and period of the suspension, and any remediation conditions imposed by the GFSI Board to regain recognition status.

The Certification Programme Owner shall confirm to the GFSI Board that these remediation conditions can be achieved within the timescales set out by the GFSI Board, when evidence of the implementation of the corrective actions will be expected, and alignment to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements can be re-established.

The GFSI Technical Manager will follow up the implementation of the corrective actions with the Certification Programme Owner; the GFSI Technical Manager may ask for the support of the Benchmark Leader.

Once the re-alignment is confirmed, the GFSI Technical Manager will inform the GFSI Executive Director and the GFSI Board.

A suspension period may be extended to a maximum of 12 months from the date the initial suspension occurred.

In the event that the GFSI Board is not satisfied with the progress made by the Certification Programme Owner or their commitment to address any of their requirements, they may withdraw recognition of the Certification Programme.

GFSI Withdrawal of Recognition

If the GFSI Board considers that a withdrawal of recognition is required, the GFSI Executive Director shall formally inform the Certification Programme Owner of this decision.

In the event that GFSI recognition is withdrawn, GFSI shall issue a news release and the GFSI website shall clearly specify the details and conditions of the withdrawal.

A Certification Programme Owner may choose to voluntarily withdraw from GFSI recognition when unforeseen circumstances put the Certification Programme into contravention of GFSI requirements. In this instance, the Certification Programme Owner

will make a request to withdraw voluntarily and make a full dossier of the circumstances available to the GFSI Executive Director.

The GFSI Executive Director will inform the GFSI Board regarding the circumstances and convene a meeting to discuss the issue as soon as possible. The GFSI Board may grant voluntary withdrawal or initiate a suspension process. The GFSI Executive Director will inform the Certification Programme Owner of this decision.

GFSI Appeals Procedure

The Certification Programme Owner has the right to appeal against any decision made by the GFSI Board, the GFSI Executive Director or any person contracted to GFSI in relation to the Benchmarking Process.

The Certification Programme Owner shall submit an appeal to the GFSI Executive Director within 30 days of the matter in dispute occurring. The appeal shall be submitted in writing to the GFSI Executive Director and shall clearly describe the reason and provide a full explanation together with substantive evidence to support a thorough investigation of the appeal.

When the appeal procedure is initiated, the status of the Certification Programme shall be amended on the GFSI website to reflect that the Certification Programme is subject to an appeal.

Any appeal shall be heard by an Appeals Committee, which is a body specifically assembled by the GFSI Board for the purposes of hearing an individual appeal. The GFSI Executive Director shall ensure that the investigation is conducted in an impartial and professional manner, and without any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

The outcome of the investigation by the Appeals Committee shall be heard by the GFSI Board, and the decision made by the Appeals Committee shall be upheld by the GFSI Board.

The GFSI Executive Director shall formally inform the Certification Programme Owner of the GFSI Board decision.

The decision of the Appeals Committee is final. Once the final decision is given, the appeal process will be closed and the GFSI website updated accordingly.

Appendix 1 – GFSI Workplan

GATE	STEP	TYPICAL TIMELINE	AGREED DEADLINE	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS
A. Application	1 – The Certification Programme Owner downloads the application form from mygfsi.com, completes it and sends it and any required supporting documents to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com			GFSI Application form
	2 – GFSI sends an invoice for the application fee; process progresses when the invoice is paid.	1 week		
	3 – GFSI reviews the application and confirm within 2 weeks of receipt if the application is accepted.	2 weeks		
	4 – A contract is signed between GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner GFSI appoints a Benchmark Leader	2 weeks		GFSI Benchmarking contract
	5 – A workplan is agreed between the Certification Programme Owner and the appointed Benchmark Leader.	1 week		GFSI Workplan

B. Desktop Review	1 – GFSI sends Self-Assessment form(s) for Part II and the scope(s) included in the application form.	1 week		GFSI Self-assessment forms
	2 – The Certification Programme Owner completes the Self-Assessment form(s) and submits them to the Benchmark Leader and GFSI with supporting evidence.	3 months		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	3 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the completed self-assessment and supporting documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 step 4; • The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the Benchmark Leader sends feedback to the Certification Programme Owner, back to step 2. 	4 weeks		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	4 – The findings of the self-assessment review are discussed and clarified through a call with the Benchmark Leader, GFSI, and Certification Programme Owner.	2 hours		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	5 – The Certification Programme Owner updates (where applicable) and sends the final Self-Assessment forms and additional supporting documents to the Benchmark Leader.	2 weeks		GFSI Self-Assessment forms

B. Desktop Review	<p>6 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the additional information provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 5. 	<p>3 weeks</p>		<p>GFSI Self-Assessment forms</p>
C. Office Visit	<p>1 – The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner plan a visit to the nominated offices of the Certification Programme Owner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The date is agreed upon based on availability. The Benchmark Leader sends a proposed agenda. 	<p>2 weeks before the visit</p>		<p>GFSI office visit agenda</p>
	<p>2 – The office visit happens at the Certification Programme Owner’s main office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Benchmark Leader completes the final list of findings and presents it to the Certification Programme Owner; The Certification Programme Owner representative signs the list of findings; <p>A copy of the signed list of findings is left with the Certification Programme Owner, another copy is sent to GFSI.</p>	<p>1-2 days</p>		<p>GFSI office visit checklist GFSI List of findings</p>

D. Corrective Action Plan and reporting	1 – The Certification Programme Owner sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan to address any findings raised during the assessment.	2 weeks		GFSI List of findings
	2 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader accepts the corrective action plan, move to step 3; • Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected, back to step 1. 	4 weeks after the office visit maximum		GFSI List of findings
	3 – The Benchmark Leader completes the assessment report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 			GFSI Assessment Report
	4 – GFSI validates the finally agreed report and action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Benchmark leader sends the final report agreed with the Certification Programme Owner to GFSI; • GFSI reviews the report and validates its content. 	1 week		GFSI List of findings

E. Public Stakeholder Consultation	<p>1 – GFSI prepares the documentation for public consultation, this includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An announcement statement; • The assessment report with the corrective action plan; • The completed and reviewed self-assessments. 	1 week		Assessment Report Self-Assessment forms
	<p>2 – The Certification Programme Owner reviews the proposed documentation for the public consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Certification Programme Owner approves the documentation: move to step 3; • The Certification Programme Owner has concerns over the content of the report, they submit their suggested changes to GFSI, back to step 1. 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	<p>3 – GFSI makes the approved documentation available for stakeholder consultation on mygfsi.com for four weeks.</p>	4 weeks		GFSI Public Consultation comment form
	<p>4 – GFSI closes the public consultation and sends the list of received comments to the Certification Programme Owner and the Benchmark Leader.</p>	1 week		

F. Completion of corrective actions	<p>1 – The Certification Programme Owner completes all required corrective actions and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 their above addition, and any required supportive documents, to the Benchmark Leader. 	Depending on corrective actions		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>2 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the answers from the Certification Programme Owner to the comments and findings of the assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Benchmark Leader accepts the comments and completion of the corrective actions from the Certification Programme Owner – move to gate G; he Benchmark Leader rejects the comments and evidence of completion of corrective actions from the Certification Programme Owner – back to step 1. 	2 weeks		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>3 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report with the completed corrective actions to GFSI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GFSI accepts the completed corrective actions: move to G GFSI rejects the completed actions and/or asks for more information: back to step 1. 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report

G. GFSI Final recognition Decision and Communication	1 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to GFSI.	3 months after the public consultation maximum		GFSI Assessment Report
	2 – GFSI reviews the final assessment report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GFSI accepts the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: move to step 3; • GFSI challenges the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: feedback is sent to the Benchmark Leader for consideration, back to step 1; 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report
	3 – GFSI submits the recommendation to the GFSI Board who votes for or against this recommendation. The Certification Programme Owner recognition status is based on the board majority vote.	2 weeks		GFSI Assessment Report
	4 – GFSI informs the Certification Programme Owner of the final decision and confirms next step: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Certification Programme Owner agrees to communicate publicly the result of their assessment – move to step 5. • The Certification Programme Owner does not want the result of their assessment publicly communicated – move to step 6. <p>In either case, GFSI posts a signed statement of alignment to the Certification Programme Owner.</p>	1 week		GFSI Statement of Alignment

G. GFSI Final recognition Decision and Communication	5 – GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner agree a common news release text and publish this jointly on their respective media. Move to step 6.	2 weeks		
	6 – GFSI updates mygfsi.com and ensures the Certification Programme Owner updates their own website when applicable.			
H. Monitoring of continuous alignment	1 – Once a year, the Certification Programme Owner completes a monitoring record and sends this to GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.			GFSI Monitoring Record
	2 – The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner schedule the required activities of the monitoring of continuous alignment.			
	3 – The Benchmark Leader carries out the first random record review and the gap analysis with the Certification Programme Owner.	Within 6 months of the last office visit		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	4 – The Benchmark Leader carries out an office visit.	Within 12 months of the previous office visit		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	5 – The Benchmark Leader carries out a second random record review.	Within 6 months of the first random record review		GFSI Monitoring Checklist

H. Monitoring of continuous alignment	<p>6 – The Certification Programme Owner and Benchmark Leader ensure that an acceptable corrective action plan is completed for any findings from the monitoring activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings are submitted to the GFSI Technical Committee for review. If any findings raise concerns to the Benchmark Leader on the recognition status of the Certification Programme Owner, the sanctioning process may be initiated. 	<p>CAP submitted within 2 weeks of office visit</p>	<p>GFSI Monitoring Checklist</p>
	<p>7 – GFS validates that the results justify maintaining the Certification Programme Owner recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If any findings raise concerns GFSI recommends next steps to the GFSI Board. 		<p>GFSI Monitoring Checklist</p>