

# A study to determine the barriers and solutions to SALSA certificated businesses transitioning to the BRCGS START! Food Safety programme.

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## Introduction

Small and medium-sized (SME) food manufacturing businesses often lack the resource of larger food manufacturing businesses to meet the requirements of complex food safety assurance schemes (10), e.g. BRCGS (Brand Reputation through Compliance Global Standard) for Food Safety (1).

The SALSA (Safe and Local Supplier Approval) certification scheme (11) is a robust and holistic food safety scheme intended to provide affordable food safety assurance certification for micro and small-sized food manufacturing businesses in the United Kingdom.

The BRCGS START! programme (3), was recently developed specifically for SMEs where the full BRCGS Standard for Food Safety may not be practical or required. It is a stepping-stone from SALSA towards the full BRCGS standard.

Previous research by the ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre has recognized there is a need to support SME food manufacturing businesses to obtain third party food safety assurance certification (10), there is a particular need to enable businesses to select the most appropriate scheme for their business and to support transition towards more complex certification (9), communication and access to information are essential (8).

## Purpose

The aim of the study was to develop tools to enable SME food manufacturers to select an appropriate food safety assurance certification, and transition from the SALSA standard to the BRCGS START! programme.

## Method

The study consisted of three phases. The findings from each phase informed the development of the data collection tool in the subsequent phase:

1. A review of the SALSA standard (Issue 5) (12) and BRCGS START! programme (Issue 1) (2) was undertaken to identify additional clauses and requirements when transitioning from SALSA to BRCGS START!
2. An audit-interview schedule was devised and conducted with SME food manufacturers (n=6) to explore perceptions of additional requirements.
3. Cumulative findings informed the design and development of tools to support SMEs with scheme selection and transition.

## References and acknowledgments

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We acknowledge the valuable involvement of BRCGS, SALSA, the Welsh Government, Food Innovation Wales and the participating SME food manufacturing businesses that enabled completion of this study.

## Results

### Phase one – Food Safety Standard Review

A systematic, comparative review of the clauses and specific requirements of the SALSA standard (Issue 5) (12) and BRCGS START! programme (Issue 1) (2) was completed independently by experienced food safety professionals (n=3) from the ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre, BRCGS and SALSA.

As indicated in Table 1, SALSA had 103 clauses and BRCGS START! had 158 clauses. The reviewers discussed the differences in the clause requirements between the two schemes, and agreed that 66 clauses would require compliance when transitioning from the SALSA standard to the BRCGS START! programme. The requirements included; foreign body detection, supplier approval process and premises layout/separation.

**Table 1. Food safety schemes review by clause**

Standard	Number of clauses
SALSA standard (Issue 5)	103
BRCGS START! programme (Issue 1)	158

A transition audit-interview checklist detailing the 66 additional clauses was created to establish SME perceptions regarding compliance to the additional requirements.

**Figure 1. Excerpt of the transition audit-interview checklist.**

### Phase two – SME audit-interviews

On-site audit-interviews were conducted using the transition checklist (developed in Phase one) by an experienced technical professional from the ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre at SME food manufacturing businesses (n=6).

During the on-site audit-interviews, businesses discussed their perceived ability to comply with the requirements of each of the 66 clauses using a scale of ease and timeliness as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2. BRCGS START! clause compliance scoring criteria**

BRCGS START! clause compliance levels	Score				
	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to comply with clause requirements	Easy	Relatively Easy	Difficult	Extremely Difficult	Not possible
Length of time to comply with clause requirements	<1 month	1-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	>12 months

Using the scores allocated to each clause by the participating SMEs, the clauses were divided into three categories according to the perceived difficulty to comply with (as indicated in Table 3):

Fifteen of the clauses were ones that the participating SMEs perceived were relatively easy and would be able to comply with within the next 6 months (green).

The majority of the clauses (33 clauses), SMEs perceived that they would require some investment in resource to enable them to comply with the requirement within the next 12 months (amber).

Eighteen clauses were identified as “clauses of concern”, SMEs perceived that they would be unable to comply with the clauses within 12 months or longer (red) which would prevent businesses transitioning to BRCGS START!

**Table 3. BRCGS START! clauses categorised according to SME perceived difficulty.**

Clauses perceived to be most difficult to comply with “clauses of concern” (Average score >8)	Clauses perceived to be achievable within 12 months (Average score 5 – 7)	Clauses perceived as being easy to comply with within 6 months (Average score <4)
3.5.1.2; 3.7.2; 4.2.1; 4.3.4; 4.10.1.1; 4.10.1.2; 4.10.1.3; 4.10.1.4; 4.10.2.1; 4.10.3.1; 4.10.3.2; 5.1.2; 5.3.4; 5.3.5; 5.3.8; 5.4.6; 8.1.3; 8.4.1;	1.1.2; 1.1.8; 1.2.1; 2.5.1; 2.7.2/2.7.3; 2.9.2; 2.10.1; 3.1.2; 3.3.1; 3.4.4; 3.5.2.1; 3.8.1; 3.11.1; 4.2.3; 4.5.1; 4.7.1; 4.8.1; 4.9.2.2; 4.9.3.4; 4.10.6.1; 4.11.4; 4.14.8; 4.14.12; 4.15.3; 4.15.5; 5.2.1/5.2.3; 5.3.2; 5.7.1; 5.6.2.5; 6.2.3; 7.1.2; 7.1.6; 8.1.1;	1.1.1; 2.3.1; 3.2.1; 3.5.4.1; 3.5.4.3; 3.6.1; 3.6.3; 3.9.4; 3.10.2; 4.14.5; 5.5.2; 5.6.2.2; 5.6.2.3; 5.6.2.4; 8.1.4;

The “clauses of concern” related to supplier approval, threat assessment, foreign body detection and removal, allergen management, site segregation.

The factors cited as potential barriers to complying with these clauses included: skills, resource, access to information, site layout and condition, premises and finances.

### Phase three – Tool kit development and launch

Finally, based on the findings, a range of guidance and practical tools were produced and made available on the BRCGS website (7) to help SMEs identify the most suitable assurance scheme, and how to transition from SALSA to BRCGS START!. This includes:

- Decision tool for SMEs to select the most suitable assurance scheme (Figure 2).
- SALSA to BRCGS START! transition checklist and self-assessment tool (Figure 3).
- Webinar series for SMEs on scheme selection and transition (Figure 4).

**Figure 2. Decision tool to select the most suitable assurance scheme (4)**

**Figure 3. Transition checklist and self-assessment tool (6)**

**Figure 4. Webinar series for SMEs on selection and transition (5)**

## Conclusions

This novel study has involved scheme holders and SMEs to successfully develop a range of practical tools. The tools are intended to help SMEs identify the most suitable assurance scheme, and how to navigate through these schemes as their businesses evolve as they transition from SALSA to BRCGS START!