

Accreditation:

Supporting safe food and clean drinking water

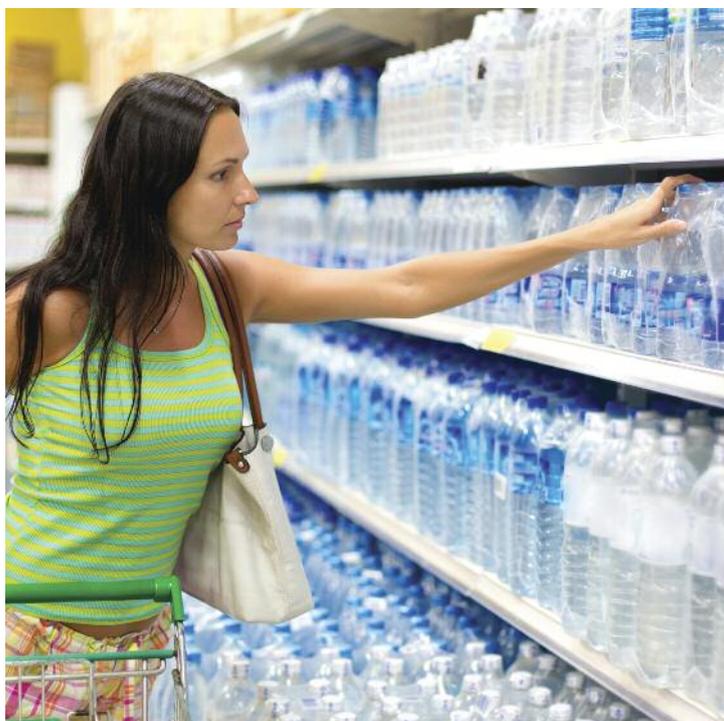


What are the issues?

- **Is our food and water safe?** Is it free of toxins? Is it free of contaminants or pollutants? Is it free of pathogens? If we have allergic responses to certain ingredients, can we trust the labelling?
- **Is it authentic?** Are we consuming what we think we are? Are the ingredients what they say on the can or on the label?
- **How is it produced?** An increasing proportion of the population is interested in the way that food and bottled water is produced, in terms of the environment, animal welfare, and provenance. Is it fair trade or organically produced?

The production and distribution of food and water involves complex supply chains and processes. In simple terms, there is the production of crops and the rearing of animals, followed by the practices involved with sourcing, harvest and slaughter. Then there is the storage, treatment and processing, and in turn packaging and distribution. The food and water industry operates in a highly competitive, dynamic and regulated environment.

There are a series of complex issues and a range of areas where there has to be tight control to ensure that the food and water supply is safe when dealing with the mass production of food and water in urban and rural areas. Consideration also needs to be given to the retail environment in terms of storage and display. Increasingly, there is an international aspect to food and water production, as ingredients, products or parts of products, may come from several countries around the world.



So how can we be confident that our food is safe and the water we drink is clean?

Samples, products, services, management systems or personnel can be evaluated against specified requirements by laboratories, certification bodies, and inspection bodies (collectively known as conformity assessment bodies). Conformity assessment is used to check that products are fit and safe for consumption against a standard, a code of practice or regulatory requirements.

Conformity assessment therefore provides a means for preventing unsafe, unhealthy or environmentally harmful products from entering the market place. Regulators can set overall policy requirements or detailed technical requirements and rely on laboratories, inspection bodies or certification bodies to check for compliance.



What is the role of accreditation?

Accreditation is the independent evaluation of these conformity assessment bodies against recognised standards to carry out specific activities to ensure their integrity, impartiality and competence. Through the application of national and international standards, government, procurers and consumers can have confidence in the calibration and test results, inspection reports and certifications provided by the conformity assessment bodies.

Accreditation bodies are established in many countries with the primary purpose of ensuring that conformity assessment bodies are subject to oversight by an authoritative body.

Accreditation bodies, that have been evaluated by peers as competent, sign arrangements that enhance the acceptance of products and services across national borders, thereby creating a framework to support trade.

These arrangements are managed by the ILAC, in the area of laboratory and inspection accreditation, and the IAF, in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel accreditation. Both ILAC and IAF work together and coordinate their efforts to enhance accreditation and conformity assessment worldwide.



What benefit does accreditation provide?

For national authorities and regulators

Regulators can set policy requirements or detailed technical requirements and rely on accredited laboratories, inspection bodies or certification bodies to check for compliance. Regulators can therefore reduce their in-house inspectorates and specialist assessment personnel to reduce cost, or target their inspections more effectively. The use of accredited services can also moderate the need for additional legislation, as well as reducing the risk of unintended consequences. International accreditation arrangements provide regulators with a robust and credible framework to accept accredited test results, inspection reports and certifications from overseas, with an equivalent level of confidence as if they were carried out in the local economy. Accreditation therefore provides a reliable monitoring tool to support the work of food safety and drinking water agencies.

Case studies and research to highlight the benefits in the food sector can be found on Public Sector Assurance – www.publicsectorassurance.org/topic-areas/food-safety-agriculture

For businesses operating in the food and water industry

Supermarket chains and food retailers are increasingly demanding that their suppliers demonstrate that their products meet food and water safety standards by requiring accredited test reports, inspection reports and certifications.

Compliance with food and water safety standards demonstrates that suppliers are meeting appropriate levels of safety, environmental performance, and animal welfare. Accreditation, and the use of accredited conformity assessment bodies, can also support business in the supply chain against potential liability claims.

International accreditation agreements provide an infrastructure that allows accredited certificates to be accepted around the world. This reduces the risk of products being rejected by international trading partners, and for the need to have products re-evaluated on entry into each country.

Case studies to demonstrate the value of accredited conformity assessment can be found on – www.business-benefits.org

For consumers

Consumer confidence can be gained from goods or services that are accompanied by an accredited certificate of conformity. International accreditation agreements ensure that such goods and services placed on the market, from whichever country of origin, meet standards of quality and safety.

About ILAC

ILAC is the international authority on laboratory and inspection accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and affiliated organisations throughout the world. Its website www.ilac.org can provide a range of information on laboratory and inspection accreditation, as well as the location of its members worldwide.

ILAC promotes the increased use and acceptance, by industry as well as by government, of the results from accredited laboratories and inspection bodies, including results from accredited organisations in other countries. ILAC liaises with many international bodies and stakeholders to achieve shared objectives.



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About IAF

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is a global association of Accreditation Bodies, Certification Body Associations and other organisations involved in conformity assessment activities in a variety of fields including management systems, products, services and personnel.

IAF promotes the worldwide acceptance of certificates of conformity issued by certification bodies accredited by an Accreditation Body Member, and seeks to add value for all stakeholders through its activities and programs.



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