

Executive summary

GFSI launched a stakeholder consultation on the technical content of the Benchmarking Requirements for Professional Recognition Bodies (PRB) and the ability of the proposed approach to deliver the outcomes of Feature 1 of the Race To The Top, with the objective of developing harmonisation and benchmarking requirements for providers of food safety auditor training and on-going Continuing Professional Development (CPD). GFSI sought feedback to the consultation via an online survey and feedback form, which they provided to Leatherhead to analyse, along with feedback from letters received from the GFSI community.

A relatively high proportion of the survey respondents (total 61) agreed that the new PRB approach would deliver against the objective of providing a framework requiring auditor CPD. When questioned on the perceived benefits of the new approach, respondents gave a range of responses, the most popular benefits were: core competencies are scheme agnostic, streamlined qualification requirements to reduce complexity, and the competence of auditors would be independently verified. There was no consensus on whether the level of detail on auditor competencies to be verified by the PRB (Annex I to the benchmarking requirements for PRBs), was appropriate.

The survey data and other feedback received in response to the consultation, showed significant opposition to the proposed approach by the Certification Bodies (CB) and CB Associations (CBA), with requests for an alternative approach. The manufacturers / Food Business Operators (FBO) seemed more positive overall, as were the training organisations. The Certified Programme Owners (CPO) gave a fairly balanced response, but the Accreditation Bodies (AB) and AB Associations (ABA) overall had more criticism than praise. Some of the feedback received was not constructive in nature, with the stakeholders either using the opportunity to simply oppose the new approach, or in the case of food safety auditors, to use the platform to communicate their displeasure with their current situation.

The key concerns raised in the consultation feedback were as below, ranked in order of importance:

1. Increased costs with the introduction of PRBs, to the auditor and the auditee
2. Added complexity and duplication of efforts of PRBs with existing stakeholders
3. Exacerbation of auditor shortage, particularly for primary production sites
4. The requirement of local knowledge by the PRB and availability of PRBs globally
5. Data sharing between PRBs, CBs, CPOs and the auditor
6. Evaluation of soft auditing skills by the PRB

The provision of more information by GFSI on the new approach, is recommended to assuage these concerns. Specifically, how key stakeholders will interact and their responsibilities where these are anticipated to overlap, a cost analysis, clarification on the intended registration process for existing auditors, and transitional measures.