

Demonstrating an appropriate food safety culture in your business

An introduction to food safety culture

Food safety culture is how everyone in a food business, from managers to employees, thinks and acts about food safety on a consistent basis. It reflects the commitment to food safety at every step, and within every role. It's about converting safe food practices into safe food habits.

Think of food safety culture as a team effort. Everyone needs to work together to keep food safe. This means knowing what can go wrong, talking to each other, and making sure that everyone feels comfortable about highlighting problems.

How to establish an appropriate food safety culture in your business

An appropriate food safety culture means that everyone in your business understands how important food safety is and works together to keep food safe, from goods inwards checks right through to service or sale. It's not just about following rules. Food businesses must demonstrate that they have an appropriate food safety culture, as required by food law.

An appropriate food safety culture is built on strong leadership, clear communication, and everyone being involved. It takes into account the size and nature of your business.

Different businesses need different approaches to food safety culture.

A ready-to-eat delicatessen might need to focus on food safety awareness for staff, especially in the areas of hygiene and food handling. This approach might benefit from training procedures and practical mentorship.

A coffee shop (not handling other food on-site) with high staff turnover and language barrier challenges might need to emphasise clear communication; visual aids, such as colour-coded equipment; supervision; and consistent rule reinforcement.

Using the Safe Catering Pack to support food safety culture

The Safe Catering Pack can help you to demonstrate what an appropriate food safety culture looks like in your business, along with other activities. By actively and correctly using the Safe Catering Pack, you are already prioritising food safety, which is an important element of food safety culture implementation. Make sure your Safe Catering Pack is tailored to your business's activities and matches your **actual** day-to-day practices. It should reflect how your business really operates, not just what's written on paper.

Food safety culture elements could be supported by the following:

- **Management commitment:** Show this through proper use of the entire Safe Catering Pack (complete all sections as relevant to your business) and providing staff with necessary tools (e.g. calibrated probes; enough cleaning time and appropriate equipment; sufficient storage capacity). Ensure that you have identified and recorded checks for all steps, such as cooking or chilling. Also complete the 'Other steps' section for any activity not covered in the Safe Catering Pack (e.g. fermenting, liquidising food, sous vide, vacuum packing, or serving raw or cooked food such as steak tartare). Show how you monitor and manage these steps through daily checks, cleaning schedules, temperature records, etc. See records SC1–SC9 in section 6, page 1.
- **Communication and awareness:** Ensure that staff understand the 'why' behind each step (e.g. safe cooking temperatures) in order to ensure that controls are applied correctly. Provide regular discussions at staff meetings, instruction, supervision, and ongoing training for all staff (both induction and refresher training). Training should cover essential topics like personal hygiene, cross-contamination, allergens, temperature control, and cleaning. The Safe Catering Pack is a good training aid, and staff should be familiar with the pack and how it is used in your business. See SC6 (Hygiene Training Record) in section 6, page 8.
- **Employee engagement:** Demonstrate this through staff routinely completing required daily records (e.g. cleaning and temperature checks). Involve staff in checking and following the Safe Catering Pack so that everyone understands why food safety controls are important. Make it easy for staff to speak up on food safety concerns and ideas by creating a space where they feel safe sharing.
- **Checks and improvement:** Keep your Safe Catering Pack up to date; review it regularly (at least annually), including anytime you change your menu, equipment, suppliers, activities or staff roles, etc. It is important to make sure that managers/supervisors are regularly checking and signing records, such as temperature records. Log any issues that arise and what corrective action you took on the relevant Safe Catering Pack record, e.g. Hygiene Inspection Checklist (SC5, section 6, page 6). Check the FSAI website for any updates or new sections and include them in your pack.

Accurate record-keeping helps you comply with food law and prove that food safety is being taken seriously. You should:

- Keep training records (see SC6, section 6, page 8) for each staff member, including dates and topics covered
- Maintain daily records, such as delivery, temperature and cleaning checks, and any corrective actions taken
- Conduct regular hygiene and allergen checks and complete the records in the Hygiene Inspection Checklist (SC5, section 6, page 6) and the Allergen controls review form, to help you protect your customers and show inspectors and others that food safety is a top priority in your business.

For more information on food safety culture, visit the FSAI website (www.fsai.ie), where you can download Guidance Note No. 44: *Food Safety Culture* for free¹. You can also visit the FSAI Learning Portal for an easy-to-follow e-learning module on food safety culture². A self-assessment questionnaire is provided for your use to help you assess your food safety culture³.

1 <https://www.fsai.ie/publications/guidance-note-44-food-safety-culture>

2 <https://learningportal.fsai.ie/>

3 Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/382

Food safety culture assessment

Food safety culture assessment		Yes	No	Comments/evidence
1	Do managers stay involved and care about keeping food safe, even during busy times or when things change (for example, during staff shortages, when new ingredients are introduced, if there is broken equipment, etc.)?			
2	Do managers help staff work together to keep food safe? (For example, do managers encourage staff to speak up if they see a food safety risk and thank them for doing so? Do managers regularly provide time for staff to discuss food safety?)			
3	Do staff know the importance of their role in protecting customers and keeping food safe through visual aids/training, daily food safety reminders, observations, and feedback?			
4	Is everyone aware of what to do and who to tell if there's a food safety problem and what steps to take (for example, if food is not cooked right or is stored incorrectly, or pest activity is noted, do staff take action and tell the manager straight away)? Staff should know that if they see something , they should say something .			
5	Does the business have what is needed (such as sufficient staff, equipment and cleaning supplies) to keep food safe (for example, space for safe storage, including chilled foods/enough sanitiser for cleaning)?			
6	Does everyone know their food safety role within the business so that checks can be done on time, and records kept accurate and up to date? (For example, staff are shown how to monitor and accurately record cooking temperatures, and a manager/supervisor knows how to check that the records are completed and correct.)			
7	Does the food business ask staff for ideas, listen to their feedback, and acknowledge them when they help improve food safety?			