SALSA to BRCGS START!: Development of a Tool for SME Food Manufacturers to Transition Towards More Complex Food Safety Certification

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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

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 seen as 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), appropriate communication and access to information from scheme owners 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. Findings from each phase informed the development of data collection tools in the subsequent phase:

- 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 the SALSA standards to the BRCGS START! programme.
- 2. An audit-interview schedule was devised and conducted with UK-based SME food manufacturing businesses (n=6) to explore their perceptions of complying with the additional clause requirements.
- Cumulative findings informed the design and development of tools to support SMEs with scheme selection and transition.

Ethical Approval: Approval was obtained from the Health Care and Food, Ethics Committee at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Results and outcomes

Phase one – Review of clause requirements.

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, the SALSA standard contained 103 clauses and BRCGS START! contained 158 clauses. The reviewers discussed the differences in the clause requirements between the two schemes, and agreed that a total of 66 lifferent clauses would require compliance when transitioning from the SALSA standard to the BRCGS START! programme. The requirements included;

- foreign body detection,
- supplier approval process
- premises layout/segregation.

Table 1. Food safety schemes review by clause.

andard	Number of clauses
ALSA standard (Issue 5)	103
RCGS 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

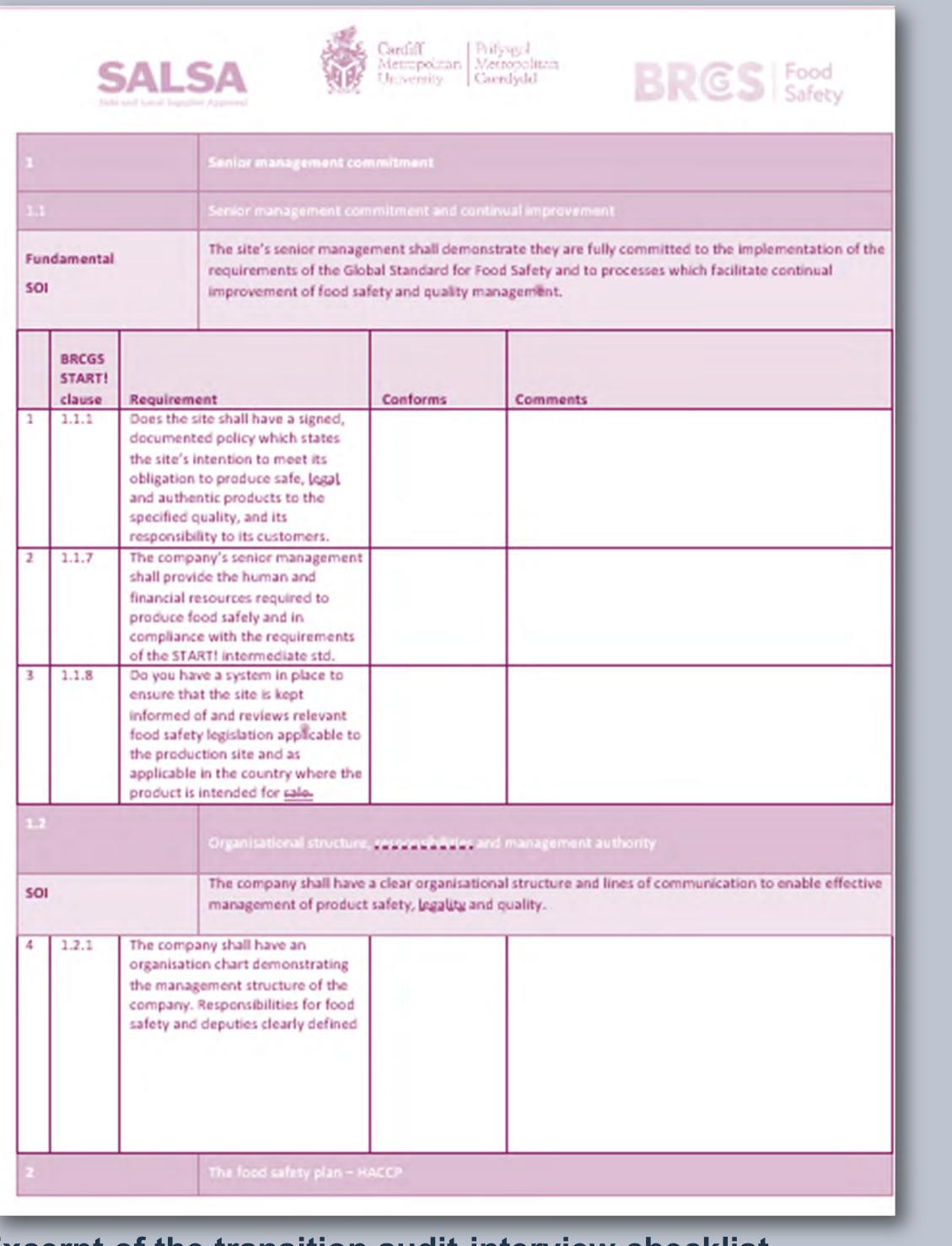


Figure 1. Excerpt of the transition audit-interview checklist.

Phase two – SME audit-interviews.

On-site audit-interviews were conducted using the transition checklist (as developed in Phase one) by an experienced technical professional from the ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre at UK-based SME food manufacturing

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

Table 2. BRCGS START! clause compliance scoring criteria.

Clauca compliance levels	Score					
Clause compliance levels	1	2	3	4	5	
Perceived ability to comply with clause requirements	Easy	Relatively Easy	Difficult	Extremely Difficult	Not possible	
Perceived 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 businesses perceived difficulty in achieving compliance (as indicated in Table 3):

- Fifteen of the clauses were those that the participating SMEs perceived as relatively easy and would be able to comply with within the next 6 months.
- The majority of the clauses (33 clauses), SMEs perceived that the clauses were more difficult to comply with and they would require some investment in resource to enable them to comply with the requirement within the next 12
- 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 which would prevent businesses transitioning to BRCGS START!

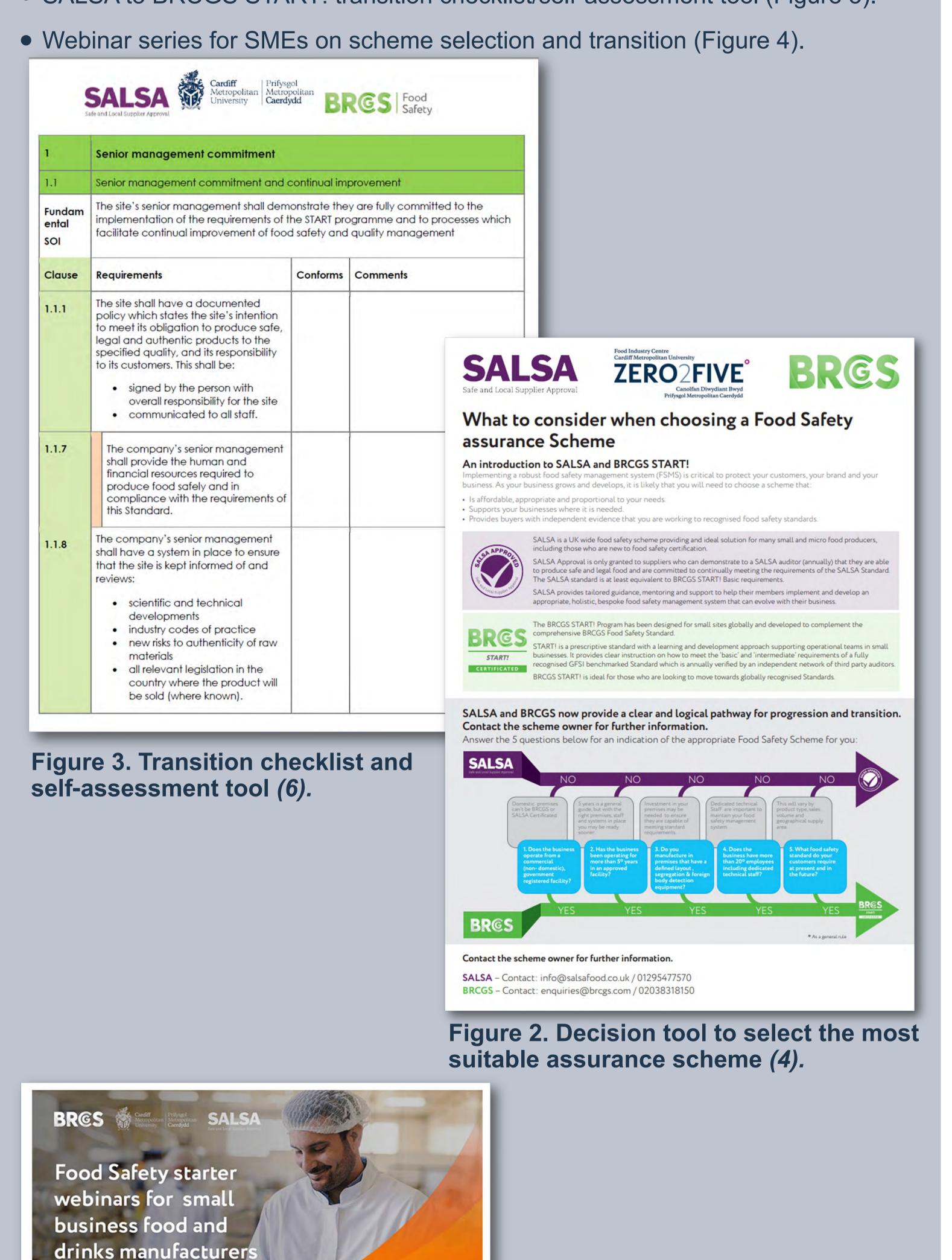
difficult to comply with "clauses of concern" (Average score >8)	Clauses perceived to be achievable within 12 months (Average score 5 – 7)	Clauses perceived as beir easy to achieve within 6 months. (Average score <4)
3.5.1.2; 3.7.2; 4.2.1; 4.3.4; 4.10.1.1; 4.10.1.2; 4.10.1.3; 4.10.1.4; 4.10.2.1; 4.10.3.1; 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; 3.5.4.7 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 5.6.2.3; 5.6.2.4; 8.1.4;

and "finances", such factors have previously been cited as barriers to obtaining 3rd party food safety certification (9,10).

Phase three – Tool kit development and launch.

Finally, based on the findings of phase one and two, 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 the SALSA standard to the BRCGS START! programme. The tools were well received by SMEs. The tools included:

- Decision tool for SMEs to select the most suitable assurance scheme (Figure 2).
- SALSA to BRCGS START! transition checklist/self-assessment tool (Figure 3).



Our three webinars on food safety schemes for small businesses will cover

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

everything you need to start your food safety journey.

Significance of the study

- This novel study has involved scheme holders and UK-based SMEs to successfully develop a range of practical tools.
- and how to navigate through these schemes as their businesses evolve and as they transition from SALSA to BRCGS START!. The tools are available to SMEs via
- Factors cited as potential barriers to complying with "clauses of concern" relate to those reported in previous research (9,10), thus indicating the need for bespoke support mechanisms (9, 8).

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