

What Interns Should Never Be Responsible for in Food Safety

Define Clear Roles

Interns and temporary staff can add real value to a quality or food safety team – when they are used appropriately. However, one of the most common risks seen during audits and incident investigations is misaligned responsibility.

Food safety systems rely on clear roles, competence, and oversight. Understanding what interns should not be responsible for is just as important as knowing how they can contribute.



1. Final Decision-Making on Food Safety Risks

Interns should never be responsible for:

- Accepting or rejecting product
- Making decisions on CCP or oPRP deviations
- Approving rework, release, or disposal of non-conforming product

These decisions require experience, authority, and a full understanding of risk – and ultimately sit with trained, appointed personnel.

How to prevent this:

Ensure all decision-making authority is clearly defined in job descriptions and procedures, and that interns operate under supervision.

2. Signing Off on Records or Verifications

Interns should not:

- Approve monitoring results
- Close corrective actions independently

Sign-off implies accountability. If something goes wrong, responsibility cannot sit with someone who lacks formal authority or training.

Best practice:

Interns may prepare or review records, but final approval must always be completed by a competent, authorised team member.

3. Managing External Audits or Inspections

Interns should never:

- Lead certification or customer audits
- Respond independently to auditors
- Commit the business to corrective actions or timelines

Auditors expect consistency, system knowledge, and accountability – not learning-on-the-job responses.

Good approach:

Allow interns to observe audits, assist with document retrieval, and learn the process without being placed in a high-risk leadership role.

4. Developing or Changing Food Safety Procedures

Interns should not:

- Write or revise core FSMS procedures without guidance
- Update HACCP plans, risk assessments, or allergen controls independently
- Implement system changes without approval

Poorly controlled changes are a common cause of non-conformances and audit findings.

Preventive control:

Any system updates must follow formal change management and be reviewed by the food safety team.

5. Acting as the “Food Safety Team Leader”

A dangerous pattern arises when food safety leadership shifts to interns or temporary staff due to convenience rather than capability.

This creates:

- Gaps in accountability
- Burnout and confusion
- Audit findings linked to competence and leadership

Strong systems rely on ownership, not convenience.

So Where Should Interns Add Value?

Interns are ideally positioned to:

- Support internal audits
- Assist with data analysis and trend reporting
- Help maintain document control
- Conduct supervised inspections
- Support training administration and awareness activities

When responsibilities are clearly defined, interns strengthen the system instead of exposing it to risk.

Final Thought

A strong food safety culture protects people – including interns. Clear boundaries, supervision, and role clarity ensure:

- Better learning outcomes
- Stronger compliance
- Reduced risk for the organisation

Engagement is powerful – misplaced responsibility is not.



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