



## Understanding Halal

### Introduction

*The term 'Halal' is frequently misunderstood as being something to do with slaughter. The reality is that Halal has a much wider context and means anything that is lawful or permissible to a Muslim. In the context of food this means any food which is permissible for a Muslim to eat. Lack of understanding about Halal may have frightened off food manufacturers and retailers from participating in a significant market sector.*

### The Muslim Market

The Muslim market for Halal foods is a growing one. Currently, approximately 3% of the UK population is Muslim, 9% in France, 5½% in Holland and 4½% in Germany. Many are now 2nd and 3rd generation citizens who are less likely to just eat traditional foods and are looking to broaden their culinary experience and eat a wide range of foods generally available to consumers but at the same time, ensure that those foods meet Islamic dietary requirements. The market for Halal foods is not just via the normal retail routes. It should be remembered that institutional purchasers such as the NHS, Prison Service and Local Authorities' school meals and care services need to cater for Muslim clients and therefore need to source Halal food.

### What Is 'Halal'?

The Qur'an lays down the principle: "Oh people! Eat of what is on earth, lawful and good". Halal applies to **all** food and not just meat as is sometimes thought (and indeed, it applies to other products such as cosmetics and detergents and sanitisers used in the food industry). Halal also requires food to be clean and wholesome.

### Common Terms

'Halal' is an Arabic word that means lawful or permissible, 'Haram' is the opposite, meaning unlawful; Mushbooh means uncertain or doubtful and is therefore something that should therefore be avoided or treated as 'Haram' where no clear evidence is available to confirm Halal status.



## What is Acceptable and Unacceptable in the Halal Diet?

Most foods are, or are capable of being Halal. Halal food means food permitted under the Shariah law that fulfils the following conditions:

- meat or any ingredient derived from an animal after slaughter must be from a species of animal that is acceptable as Halal and be slaughtered by the Halal religious slaughter method.
- other foods or ingredients must not contain any ingredients that are Haram according to Shariah law such as alcohol;
- the food must be safe, wholesome and not harmful;
- during preparation, processing, manufacture or storage the food must not be cross-contaminated by Haram materials;
- the food or its ingredients must not contain any human parts or derivatives.

## Sources of halal food and drinks

All land animals or birds are acceptable in a Halal diet except the following:

- animals or birds that are not slaughtered according to the Halal method
- pigs and dogs
- carnivorous animals, birds of prey or animals without external ears;
- pests and insects
- any animal or bird that is already dead
- any animal or bird that has been contaminated with any of the above
- animals that are forbidden to be killed in Islam such as bees, woodpeckers, etc.

Fish are considered to be Halal except those that are poisonous or hazardous to health. Shellfish are generally considered to be Halal provided they have been properly cleaned by a method such as that required by the EC regulation on products of animal origin. Amphibious animals that live both on land and water such as crocodiles, turtles and frogs are Haram.

Plants, plant products and their derivatives are Halal except those that are



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poisonous, intoxicating or hazardous to health. In particular, unprocessed foods such as fruits and vegetables are Halal provided they have not been contaminated by Haram materials.

Milk and eggs are Halal provided they are not obtained from a creature that is Haram.

Mushrooms and micro-organisms (i.e. bacteria, algae and fungi) and their by-products and/or derivatives are Halal except those that are poisonous, intoxicating or hazardous to health.

All natural minerals and chemicals are Halal except those that are poisonous, intoxicating or hazardous to health.

All kinds of water and beverages are Halal as drinks except those that are poisonous, intoxicating or hazardous to health. In particular, alcoholic drinks or alcoholic derivatives are Haram.

### Slaughter

The method of slaughter (Zibah) is prescribed and must be conducted by a Muslim slaughterman of sound mind who must recite the prayer confirming that the animal is slaughtered in the name of Allah. Each animal must be slaughtered separately so that it does not see the blood of other animals. The act of slaughter must be performed using a single cut from a sharp blade that is of sufficient size to completely sever in one movement the trachea, oesophagus, both jugular veins and both carotid arteries. The spinal cord shall be left intact. The cut must not be made from the back of the neck. The animal must be left to fully bleed out. Throughout the process, pain to the animal must be minimised.

### The Halal Debate

As the teachings of the Qur'an date from the 7th century onwards modern food processing procedures have to be interpreted in the light of those teachings. There are a number of areas that are potentially controversial. Western slaughter methods generally involve stunning and that gives rise to some debate amongst Muslims with regard to the acceptability of the method. It is a requirement of Halal slaughter that the animal is alive at the time of slaughter. Where stunning is used this means that the stun method must



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leave the animal capable of revival otherwise the meat would not be Halal. A method such as the captive bolt would be likely to result in irreversible damage to the brain and is therefore not consistent with Halal slaughter. Some Muslims are not prepared to accept that any stun method can be part of Halal slaughter.

A further issue is that it is common in the poultry industry for slaughter to be accomplished mechanically by a series of rotating blades. This is a further source of controversy as the act of slaughter when conducted automatically is no longer seen as a conscious and considered act. Others argue that it is acceptable provided the slaughter equipment is under the control of a Muslim slaughterman.

It has also been known for a recorded prayer to be used, with the tape playing continuously in the background whilst slaughter takes place. Again, this would be considered unacceptable to the majority of Muslims.

Whilst alcohol is clearly Haram, its use for sanitising hands or surfaces and as a residual ingredient in an altered state may also be an issue. Vinegars, particularly those derived from alcohols may be acceptable to some Muslims but not others who accept that their use will not give rise to intoxication.

Genetically Modified Organisms are another area of debate. Frequently lack of information about the GMO or its benefit will cause Muslims to avoid them. Most Halal certification standards do not accept GM ingredients.

Food which has been irradiated to clean it from microbiological contamination or to extend its shelf-life is not acceptable to many Muslims or Halal certification organisations.

## Halal Production Systems

Embarking on the production of Halal food need not be a daunting experience. Whilst it will require thought about the design of the manufacturing process its production is essentially another example of identity preservation (IP). The basic principles have much in common with systems to manage the production of organic food or food containing allergens. The initial challenge is to ensure that the all raw materials including additives and processing aids are demonstrably Halal. This can be done by asking for evidence of Halal



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certification, carrying out a Halal audit or the use of a supplier questionnaire that asks detailed questions about Halal status and production systems. The use of a tick the box 'suitable for Halal' approach is not recommended as this presupposes that the supplier fully understands what is meant by Halal.

Once raw materials are sourced they need to be delivered and stored in such a way that will ensure that the Halal status is maintained. Delivery should take account of potential cross-contamination as well as the normal temperature and cleanliness issues. Storage of Halal materials should ensure segregation from other products, particularly Haram materials.

Production can either be fully or partly dedicated or rely on cleaning and segregation. This is likely to be dependent upon the volume of potential Halal sales and the ease with which equipment cleaning can be accomplished. Staff will need to be trained in Halal handling procedures and basic Halal awareness so that they understand not just what they need to do but why it important that they follow it. Once produced and packed product needs to be identified as Halal. This may be by labelling it or use of a unique stock code. Where the product is certified under a recognised certification standard there may be an opportunity to use the scheme logo on the product. There may also be a need for dedicated protective clothing and utensils to avoid cross-contamination within the production process.

### Common Implementation Issues

One of the greatest difficulties in setting up a Halal production process is answering the question "what do I mean by Halal?" As can be seen from this document there are some areas where differing interpretations exist amongst end users. The key to this is having a good understanding of customers' needs and expectations and ensuring that the product you supply is capable of fulfilling them. If your customer insists that meat is from a non-stunned source then you will need to verify that to be the case. Similarly views on the use of alcoholic sanitizers should be sought. The acceptance of these can be variable. In Saudi Arabia some food companies accepted midshift use of alcoholic sanitizers if they were correctly labelled to indicate that they contained alcohols other than ethanol.



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### Halal Certification

Certification can be used to establish confidence in the production process and share that achievement with customers and end users. There are many Halal certification bodies both in the UK and throughout the world. Some, such as the Halal Authority Board have comprehensive written standards covering food hygiene and safety issues as well as the religious aspects. They may consult on a worldwide basis to ensure the widest acceptance. Others certify on the basis of judging what they see against their own beliefs. Sometimes they may be small organisations who combine consultancy with certification which blurs the distinction between these two processes and calls into question the impartiality of the scheme. This may create some problems in terms of acceptability amongst customers. Again, it is important to understand their standpoint on key issues to ensure that certification awarded by a specific body will meet customers' needs.

### Key Points

- Understand what is meant by Halal.
- Understand your customers' expectations for Halal products and be clear about how you fulfil them.
- Ensure that you can confidently demonstrate the Halal status of raw materials.
- Ensure that raw material, intermediate and finished product storage maintains Halal integrity.
- Ensure that the selected production system avoids cross-contamination.

The Society would like to thank Mike Law, Senior Consultant, FoodChain Europe Ltd (mike.law@foodchainadvisors.eu) for preparing this document