Halal - basic principles of Islam Compliant Food

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Halal logo, Swiss example
Source: Halal Certification Services GmbH

Halal logo, Asian example
Source: www.eastasiafair.com [02/06/2010]
1. Introduction and terminology

With approximately 1.8 billion people, Muslims represent the second largest religious group in the world. An estimated 45 million Muslims live in Europe. In northern latitudes the dietary requirements of Muslims had hardly been considered in food production until a few years ago. However, the marketing of foodstuffs produced and manufactured according to Islamic dietary laws is now recognized as having great potential to generate new markets. Logos and certificates from various countries of origin guarantee Halal-conformity of foods, and thus the declaration "Halal certified".

The Islamic religion is based on "divine revelations" to the Prophet Muhammad. The basis of Islam is the Koran (the holy scripture of Islam) and the Sunnah (the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad). The Koran, which consists of the divine revelations, is used as guidance by Muslims, and provides detailed counselling in the form of dos and don’ts. Accordingly, the rules for food production are derived from the Koran:

"O mankind, eat of that which is lawful and good on Earth" Surah 2: Verse 168.

"Forbidden to you is the pleasure of dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name besides that of Allah hath been invoked." Surah 5: Verse 3.

1.1. Importance of Halal and Haram

The Arabic word "Halal" means that which is permitted, approved and allowed. In relation to food this means that in addition to being of high quality, it should also be hygienic and toxin free, and must also be free of any hazardous additives or contaminants. The term Haram describes, in contrast, that which is forbidden and unacceptable. The following raw materials and foodstuffs are Haram, in other words forbidden substances, and may not be used for food production:

- meat from dead animals and its by-products
- pork and its by-products
- blood and its by-products
- meat from predators with fangs
- meat from birds of prey with claws
- meat from permitted animals that is not slaughtered in either an approved manner or in the name of Allah
- ethyl alcohol

In addition to compliance with the Halal standards, care must also be taken in other aspects. For example, it is important that Halal animals are fed permitted food. Compliance with the requirements requires a detailed analysis of the food and its preparation. Halal is a holistic view, which extends to all areas of life. Not only must the product itself be admissible, but the underlying activities must also be Islam compliant. Eggs from battery hens, products made using child labour or even financial means originating from Haram sources are not permitted.

1.2. Other key terms associated with Islamic dietary laws

In literature, journals and newspaper articles, many terms are used to refer to Halal food. The following is a brief selection:

- **Hadith**: the lore of the "statements and actions" of the Prophet Muhammad;
- **Sharia**: "The path to the source." Islamic interpretation of law is based on Sharia;
- **Sunnah**: ways of living and utterances from the Prophet Muhammad;
- **The Koran** is "the divine revelation", or colloquially the "holy book" of Muslims (in the strict sense not a common, "ordinary" book). "The Koran consists of 114 chapters (Surahs) each consisting of a different number of verses (Ayat);
- **Najis**: Dirty, unclean and repulsive;
- **Mashbooh**: Mashbooh is something that is questionable or doubtful, such as the presence of undefined ingredients in a food or the food itself;
- **Zabiha**: Zabiha stands for Islamic slaughtering. The slaughter must be in conformity with the rules of Sharia.
2. Requirements for raw materials and the production of Halal products

2.1. Plant-based raw materials

Food produced from raw vegetable materials is in principle a Halal product, provided that the Halal requirements are met during processing. Alcoholic fermentation during processing must be viewed separately and the Halal status of the foodstuffs involved must be determined. All raw vegetable materials can be used as long as they are neither toxic nor harmful to humans, animals or the environment. If harmful or toxic substances in plant materials can be eliminated during processing, then these vegetable substances are Halal.

2.2. Animal-based raw materials

In principle, the majority of animals and raw materials must be Islam compliant, in other words Halal. Therefore the Halal requirements must be followed meticulously. Regarding animal-based raw materials, the Halal requirements for meat are the most extensive. As mentioned above, the following animal resources are Haram and prohibited for human consumption: meat from dead animals (Islam distinguishes between different types of animal death and categories of animal deaths), blood, pork, meat from predatory animals with fangs, meat from birds of prey with claws, and meat from permitted livestock that has not been slaughtered either in an approved manner or in the name of Allah. Consideration must be given during dairy manufacturing that rennet used only comes from animals which have been slaughtered according to Islamic rules. Artificial substances such as enzymes may contain critical substances such as peptone, which is obtained from pigs. Fining using gelatine, as well as the use of synthetic wrapping for meat, may not be produced from pig products, but must be made from Halal products. The requirements for Halal gelatine are only met by animals that are slaughtered according to Halal rules and are thereafter certified.
2.2.1. Slaughter process
The rules of Islamic slaughter require the animal's life to be taken in the
gentlest, quickest and least painful way. According to Islamic belief, slaughter is
a cleansing process. Only animals that are allowed under Islamic law and are
slaughtered in the name of Allah fulfil the requirements for this "cleansing". Marine creatures are pure under Islamic law; the ritual slaughter of these
animals is not necessary.
Before the start of the slaughter process, the proclamation of the name of Allah
with a request for "guidance", a clear declaration of intent before Allah, has the
highest priority and is mandatory. The carotid arteries, jugular veins,
oesophagus and trachea of the animal must be severed during slaughter. The
spinal cord (medulla oblongata) must not be cut or damaged, so the animal's
blood can drain more quickly from the muscles through muscular contractions
and spasms, and accordingly the muscles will quickly become bloodless. The
slaughter may be carried out by any adult Muslim (of either sex), who knows,
fully understands and applies Islamic law, is emotionally stable and proficient in
slaughtering. The slaughterer should be a practicing Muslim.
2.3. **Prohibited materials: some examples**

All ingredients, additives and processing aids used must meet Halal requirements. Halal requirements are not met in the following examples:

- alcohol obtained from fermentation and then used in soups or sweets
- flavourings which contain alcohol (ethanol) in the end product
- enzymes from the stomach lining of calves or gelatine from cattle which were not slaughtered according to Islamic rules
- antioxidants from animals that were not slaughtered according to Islamic rules
- dyes that use animal glycerine as a carrier, if the animals were not slaughtered according to Islamic rules

2.4. **Requirements for the production process**

The production of Halal products requires that all possible sources of contaminants are removed or avoided during manufacture. This can either be achieved through proper product sequencing, by thorough cleaning and disinfection of the production lines, or by a complete or partial separation of the production equipment. There are no uniform standards, and certifying bodies follow preferred practices in accordance with local conditions as well as economic and environmental factors. Basically, it is recommended that a separate production line for Halal products be operated in order to rule out any possible impurities and contamination. **Mixing any product with pork is, for example, incompatible with Halal requirements. This issue is handled in a correspondingly strict manner in all Halal guidelines.** In contrast, it is conceivable that a production line in the dough industry could be disinfected with alcohol before the production of Halal products. A prerequisite, however, is that the alcohol is proven to be no longer present before Halal production begins. Any materials used during the production process should not contain non-permitted or Haram substances, and all equipment, utensils, machines and processing aids that are used for Halal food must be clearly marked and stored separately to avoid possible contamination.
2.5. Requirements for packaging and labelling / traceability

Material which is used for the packaging of food must, like the food, also meet Halal requirements. For example, the raw materials used to produce the packaging materials may not be of unspecified animal origin. In order to use Halal brands, symbols or logos, the manufacturer must enter into a written agreement with the certification authority, which regulates the use of the particular logo or symbol. The following information must be present on the packaging or transport units of Halal food or semi-finished products as a minimum:

- the names and symbols of the certification authority
- product name
- the importer
- a list of all ingredients
- the production date or batch coding, to ensure traceability
- country of origin

When delivered, meat must be accompanied by a certificate from an Islamic slaughterhouse which has been approved by the respective religious institution. In addition to the above-mentioned information, the slaughter and butchering dates are necessary for the meat.

3. Halal Certification

For a food establishment to be allowed to manufacture Halal products, it needs the approval of an Islamic certification institution. The establishment must ensure that it can guarantee Halal conformity from receipt to distribution. Worldwide there are almost 150 Islamic certification bodies, which check that their own regulations, taken from Sharia law, are followed. There are ongoing efforts to implement a globally recognized standard. Each certification agency develops its own standards in collaboration with local religious authorities; these are tailored to the majority of the local Muslim population. Almost 150 certification bodies mean, however, an equal number of different logos and interpretations of Halal guidelines. In Switzerland, the Swiss Halal standard for Halal products is used by Halal Certification Services GmbH to issue Halal certificates according to its guidelines. Halal Certification Service GmbH in Rheinfelden offers Halal certification services in Europe. As well as company
certificates, product certificates are issued to ensure globally recognised and respected approval of the company. The area of operations of the certification organizations is, in principle, independent of any particular region. There are therefore no cantonal or regional limitations. However, logistical reasons such as geographical proximity, language barriers, knowledge of local food law, and not least the ability to secure local support, for the most part limit the area of operations to the countries or regions in which the certification companies are located.

Halal Certification Services GmbH primarily advises European companies, testing products and production facilities, issuing Halal certificates, and monitoring operations through periodic inspections. The certificates of Halal Certification Services are globally accepted. Official recognition was acquired for the respective authorities in Malaysia (JAKIM), Indonesia (MUI), Singapore (MUIS) and Thailand (HIT).

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