

Guidance Note on Halal Food

Background

Halal is an Arabic word which means “permissible”, a related word in the Qur’an is *Tayyab* which means wholesome and fit for human consumption. With regard to food described as *Halal*, it means food that Muslims are permitted to consume under Islamic law.

The opposite of *Halal* is *Haram*, which means “prohibited by God, unwholesome, foul”. It follows, for example, that any meat that has not been rendered *Halal* by Islamic slaughter or that is liable to cause ill health, e.g. meat that is contaminated and unfit for consumption, cannot be considered *Halal*. Meat also cannot be considered *Halal* if it is past its “minimum durability marking”. If a Muslim is sold *Haram* food, it is viewed very seriously, as it causes them to eat food prohibited in Islam and, in addition, it may be a form of fraud or deception.

Muslims regard Al Qur’an as the very words of God as revealed to the last prophet Muhammed, and is the primary source of Islamic law. In the Al Qur’an there are prohibitions on the consumption of pork, blood, carrion and alcohol, among other things.

For a product to be *Halal* (lawful) for Muslim consumption, and described as such, all the ingredients should be *Halal*. The Muslim requirement for food to be *Halal* applies whether the food business operator is preparing, handling, processing, manufacturing, packaging, storing, importing, distributing, supplying, transporting or selling food, whether for profit or not, from a factory, warehouse, shop, restaurant, van, village hall, community centre or vending machine.

Examples of where the requirements of food law relate to Halal requirements

There are many similarities between aspects of *Halal* requirements and aspects of food law. A *Halal* food business operator must not only comply with food law but with the **Islamic Shariah (Law)** related to food. The requirements of the **Islamic** dietary laws are that:

- Meat, and other foods, including food ingredients, whether home-produced or imported, must be *Halal*.
- Meat must be obtained from *Halal* sources, e.g. an abattoir must have the facilities and personnel to undertake *Halal* slaughter. See Annex 1 for further information on Islamic Shariah (Law) relating to *Halal* slaughter, provided by the Agency’s Muslim Organisations Working Group.
- Meat must be wholesome and meet food safety requirements - if meat is unfit for human consumption it cannot be considered *Halal*, even if slaughtered in the prescribed manner.

To be Halal:

- The animal should be alive or deemed to be alive at the actual time of slaughter and slaughter must be carried out in compliance with Islamic Shariah and the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (as amended)¹. Animals/birds must be slaughtered by severance of neck arteries and jugular veins.
- No pork or pork ingredients must be present in the food.
- No alcohol or other intoxicants must be used.
- Any animal product, such as gelatine, must be produced from animals slaughtered in accordance with the Islamic Shariah.
- Any animal fat or meat must come from animals slaughtered in accordance with the Islamic Shariah.
- Any preparation area and the equipment used should be kept in such a manner as to prevent cross contact, contamination or mixing *Halal* food with non-*Halal* food.

¹ Under Regulation 22 “Schedule 5 (which relates to the stunning and killing of animals) shall not apply to any animal which is slaughtered in accordance with Schedule 12 (which relates to slaughter by a religious method)”.

Displaying *Halal* and non-*Halal* meat on the same premises does not in itself render *Halal* meat non-*Halal*. If open, unpackaged *Haram* food is stored and displayed alongside *Halal* meat, there would have to be clear separation and suitable labelling. However it should be noted that, as any direct or indirect contact between *Halal* and *Haram* food (e.g. use of the same knives or chopping boards etc) would render *Halal* meat and poultry as *Haram*, this could be difficult to achieve in practice.

There is no legal requirement to label food as being *Halal*. If a description "HALAL" is made, then it must be clear which product the description refers to, if the business is not to run the risk of committing offences of mis-describing the foods on sale.

At present there are few recognised systems of certifying that a particular food is *Halal*. However, certain Muslim organisations are collaborating to develop an umbrella certification board for *Halal* foods.

A Food Safety Officer or Trading Standards Officer may check whether a food claiming to be *Halal* actually is *Halal*. This could be during a routine inspection, when investigating a complaint or as part of a sampling programme. In all cases, officers will routinely check who food businesses buy their meat from.

If an officer finds a business is describing *Halal* foods incorrectly, they may consider action. Often a contravention of *Halal* principles is also a breach of food law. For example, if a food is described as *Halal* but is found to contain pork, then this would be considered *Haram* to a Muslim and may well contravene food laws for composition and labelling. Taking samples and sending food for analysis is one way that officers can check composition and therefore the *Halal* claim.

Where appropriate, an officer may consider taking further action which could potentially lead to prosecution.

Acknowledgement: This document has been adapted by Brighton & Hove City Council Food Safety team from guidance supplied by the Food Standards Agency which was created with help and advice from members of the Agency's Muslim Organisations Working Group.

ANNEX I

Islamic Shariah (law) relating to slaughter of animals or poultry

- Animal and birds should have preferably been raised in a natural environment.
- Their feed should not contain animal-based products.
- Animals and poultry at farms or lairages must be cared for properly. They must be fed and watered before slaughter.
- They must receive ante-mortem inspection so that only healthy animals are brought in for slaughter.
- In the slaughterhouse animals must not be able to see other animals being slaughtered, nor must they have sight of blood. This requires cleaning the area before the next slaughter.
- There must be no cruelty to animals or poultry at any time.
- The slaughter man must be a Muslim, who has been properly trained and licensed.
- All slaughtering must be carried out in a licensed slaughterhouse.
- Places where pigs are slaughtered should be avoided.
- The slaughter man must use a sharp knife (which must not be sharpened in front of the animal). He must sever the jugular veins and carotid arteries as well as the oesophagus and trachea, but not the spinal cord as this restricts convulsion, which in turn restricts the pumping out of blood.
- At the time of slaughter he must pronounce *Bismillah Allahu Akbar* (In the name of God, God is the Greatest) on each animal or bird.
- At all times the meat and general hygiene regulations must be complied with.
- Any carcasses found unfit on post mortem inspection must not be used for food for human consumption.