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Halal Digest

Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America
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Features

Assalamu Alaikum

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ASSALAAMU ALAIKUM WA RAHMATULLAH

Alhamdulillah was-salatu was-salaamu 'ala rasoolillah. All thanks and praise is to ALLAH, Subhanahu wa ta'ala, and we ask that HIS blessings and peace be upon HIS Messenger, Muhammad, salla ALLAHu alaihi wa sallam. This Aya from Surat Al-Ma-ida is the basis for permitting Muslims to consume the food of the "People of the Book", referred to in the Quran as "Ahlul Kitab". The

term Ahlul Kitab appears in the Quran around 35 times, but only once in reference to food. Those whom received the book (Al-Latheena Utul-Kitab) or other forms of this appear an additional 18 times, so the total references to Ahlul-Kitab are around 53. In future articles, we will discuss the food of Ahlul Kitab and other Ayat concerning Halal and haram foods.

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
حِلٌّ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
إِذَا عَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَفِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي
أَخْدَانٍ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي
الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

"This day are (all) things Good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, when ye givethem their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues. If any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)." (Al-Ma-ida: 5)



Food News

IFANCA attended the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) annual convention in Dallas, June 11-14. There were many inquiries about Halal certification and services. It is clear food producers are looking to the Halal market as an important part of their future plans.

Mary Ann Jackson, President and Founder of J&M™ Company and My Own meals™, Inc. addresses the Religious & Ethnic Foods Division attendees at the IFT Conference in Dallas. Part of her message: Muslims do not accept kosher as a substitute for Halal certification. See an extract of her lecture below under the heading 'Getting Religion - For Your Products'.

The State of New Jersey passed the Halal Food Consumer Protection Act. This act requires food producers and sellers to disclose the basis of the claim their food is Halal.

A National Institutes of Health study indicates reducing salt intake decreases the chance of developing high blood pressure. Eating more fruits and vegetables also reduces blood pressure. (Reported in Food Ingredients Online: www.foodingredientsonline.com)

Evidence suggests that peanut allergy may be inherited. A study of identical and fraternal twins shows a much higher incidence of the identical twins having the allergy.(Reported in Food Ingredients Online: www.foodingredientsonline.com)

Americans consume more sugar and sweeteners than the rest of the world's consumers. For the period 1995-97, daily per capita consumption averaged 658 calories in the US vs. 373 in Europe, 197 in developing Asia and 87 in sub-Saharan Africa. I guess Americans have a sweet tooth! (Reported in Milling & Baking News, June 6, 2000.)

Soy meal deadens the perception of pain while blueberries, cherries, curry powder, dried dates, licorice and prunes have pain-killing properties. (Reported in Food Processing, June 2000.)

Lamb producers can now sign up for some of the \$30 million in direct cash payments from the US government. The purpose of the assistance program is to help improve production efficiency and marketability of lamb meat. More information is available at the USDA web site at www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/psd.

The USDA announced a scholarship program for Hispanic students. For more information, contact: Maria Patterson at (202) 720-6506 or by email at mpatterson@reeusda.gov.



Getting Religion - For Your Products

Extracted from a talk delivered by Mary Anne Jackson, President and Founder of J&M™ Company and My Own Meals™, Inc. of Deerfield, IL. The talk was delivered at the Religious & Ethnic Foods Division Session of the Annual Meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists Conference held in Dallas, Texas during June 10-14, 2000.

My Own Meals, Inc. was established in 1986, to bring great-tasting, top-quality, nutritious, refrigeration-free meals to the market. Later on, we added Halal certified meals to the product line. Getting there was an adventure and here is what we learned. Let's begin by dispelling some myths about religious supervision:

Myth 1.

Supervision: You cannot just pay a Muslim inspector a fee to bless the plant and then go home. Halal means "proper or permitted". There are religious procedures and practices involved in accomplishing this, not just a blessing.

Myth 2.

Halal labeling: Halal foods encompass acceptable products and practices.

Following Halal rules according to books or previous experiences does not mean a producer can label the product as Halal, although many companies do this, particularly with exports. Savvy consumers will force these companies out of the market. Food items must be "certified" Halal by a trained and reputable organization. Certification means production according to specific rules. Some states have laws pertaining to Halal labeling.

Myth 3.

Too Expensive: Halal certification costs too much. It is true there is a fee for Halal certification. However, as producers, you must realize that it is the Halal certification that you will use to market your products, to increase your sales and profits. In fact, the consumers pay the certification fees by buying your certified food items. These consumers pay a premium to buy and consume products certified by a trustworthy, trained religious supervisor.

Myth 4.

Kosher is Halal: Some kosher producers believe that Muslims accept kosher as meeting Halal standards. In fact, Muslims do not accept kosher certification as a substitute for Halal certification. Some Muslims may have believed that kosher slaughter was similar to Halal, but they are learning that this is not true and they are demanding Halal certified products. Internationally, only proper Halal certification is acceptable and monitoring agencies are being established to ensure compliance. This international attitude is moving into the U.S. market.

Let's correct some rumors about what is considered Halal:

Rumor 1.

The plant was blessed. A Muslim inspector cannot make a product Halal by saying a blessing at the start of the slaughtering process or at the end of the process or on meat that has already been slaughtered. A Muslim

slaughterman must slaughter each animal and perform his pronouncements on each animal as he slaughters it.

Rumor 2.

We played the tape. Recordings of blessings cannot be used to substitute for the devotion of an observant Muslim.

Rumor 3.

My slaughter is humane. Producers cannot accept the word of the slaughterhouse that humane methods were used and therefore should be considered the same as Halal.

Rumor 4.

We have a certificate. Producers can never label a meat product as Halal if there is no on-site Muslim participation. This is where our country has lost competitively in the international market.

Rumor 5.

Pork. Producers cannot simultaneously process any pork or pork-derived product while producing Halal-labeled meat.

Rumor 6.

We sanitized in the morning. Producers cannot process any pork or pork-derived product immediately prior to the processing of any Halal labeled product without a full, comprehensive, and detailed cleaning.



Demand for Halal and Zabiha Halal Products

In the context of food, Halal means “proper or permitted” to consume as defined in the Quran, the Muslim holy book, and haram means “forbidden” to consume. Forbidden foods include pork, alcohol, meat from improperly slaughtered animals and all by-products or derivatives of these. Halal is a growing international trade issue because there are over one billion Muslims in the world market and about 8-10 million in the US. In the past, the food in most international Halal markets was produced locally, so its acceptable Halal status was assumed. However, as the volume of imported foods has increased, Halal certification has become a growing issue. The reliance on acceptable certifying organizations has become increasingly more important. This affects all US exporters as these Halal product-importing countries are becoming more aware of unacceptable practices in Halal labeling and have started to take action.

When we first entered the religious meals market, we thought we could convince Muslims to accept kosher instead of going through the expense and effort of two separate production runs. However, it is not true that Muslims will accept kosher, especially if meat ingredients are involved. We learned that we had to produce and market our meals separately, so we set up a division of our company, called J&M Com-

pany, to produce and market Halal meat products.

In the past, Muslims trusted food producers when they claimed their products were Halal. Because of this trust, there was very little policing of the market by the Muslim community. This lowered the entry barriers and led to the spiraling of unreported mislabeling. Companies labeled products Halal, whether they were certified as Halal or not. Some companies still do this, but they are being exposed, making it more difficult for them to sell their products in the U.S. and abroad.

In addition to many Halal specialty stores, some Internet food stores have started up. In the prison system, more and more lawsuits are being won by Muslims to get Halal foods. Hospitals are starting to buy Halal meals. Many U.S. food companies are in the process of establishing standards and revising formulations for future Halal certification, and Halal certifying agencies are getting busier. In some states, labeling regulations are being proposed to put an end to mislabeling of products as Halal. Companies that are not properly certifying their products are running an increased risk of exposure, which could lead to a substantial loss of business. In the early 1990s, Kuwait blacklisted our country’s poultry producers because of improper practices. Companies purchased Halal certificates through the mail without supervision or played audiotapes of prayers in their plants in place of an on-site inspector. This was easier for the producers, so they went along with it. Unfortunately, some of these “illegal” practices continue today, making certification by a reputable cer-

tifying organization even more critical. And now, the Muslim community is publicly exposing such practices to the detriment of these producers.

Today, meat is slaughtered by trained Muslim slaughtermen under the standards, practices, and inspection of a trusted Islamic organization. Poultry is usually mechanically slaughtered with a trained Muslim slaughterman present to perform the pronouncements and to hand-slaughter only those poultry, which missed the mechanical knife. The new trend (particularly in Indonesia and Southeast Asia) is for all birds to be hand-slaughtered by a Muslim.

As a cautionary note, there are some slaughterhouses that are owned and operated by Muslims who do all their own slaughter without any independent third party inspection. This could raise questions and lead to problems if no reputable, independent organization has oversight.

Halal Certification

Halal requirements are not difficult to meet, but they should not be viewed lightly or glossed over. There are generally two levels of inspection. In a facility that makes the same products day after day using the same ingredients, the production plant and products can become certified as Halal acceptable. Inspection involves approving the ingredients used and the ingredient suppliers and establishing Halal production and quality procedures. Then the facility can be audited on a periodic basis by the certifying organization. This is acceptable with products



such as candy, cereal, granola bars, pasta, spices, etc.

In a facility where many differing products are produced, inspection is more involved. The producer must have an on-site Muslim inspector for a special Halal certified production run. Whenever meat products are produced, inspection and cleaning are also more involved. Generally, before starting Halal production, a Muslim inspector checks to see that all non-Halal ingredients are removed from the production area, and that the equipment and the surrounding areas are clean. Anything not clean must first be cleaned and approved before commencing production.

A trained inspector and the certifying organization must approve the ingredients and suppliers. Some ingredients may contain questionable sub-ingredients. For example, binders and emulsifiers such as polysorbates, or sodium stearates may be derived from, or contain, ingredients of animal origin. Flavors may use an alcohol base. Gelatin may be derived from pork or non-Zabiha animals. The presence of questionable sub-ingredients may require on-site certification of the main ingredient.

Agreed upon production procedures are established between the certifying organization and the producer. These procedures may include incoming ingredient segregation and inspection, cleaning systems, record keeping, lot coding, packaging control, etc. Often, these are standard operating procedures that may have been modified for specific

Halal concerns. The certifying organization will then determine how much on-site inspection is needed, given the circumstances.

Considerations In Determining The Required Level Of Certification

First, decide whether the plant will remain Halal all the time, or only for specific runs. To remain Halal all the time, means that all products in and out of the plant must always be Halal.

Next, determine whether the production is complicated or simple. A simple production plant, such as one used for candy production, will remain Halal unless something compromises the production. Only product that is certified may carry the supervising organization's symbol on the package. The presence of glycerin, gelatin, and flavorings within the plant may classify this as complicated production.

For complicated production, on-site religious supervision and control are required throughout all stages of production, from raw material ordering, through production and cooking, to final packaging. Examples of complicated production include producing frozen dinners, producing refrigeration-free meals, slaughtering, preparing processed meats, cooking products in a plant that also runs non-Halal products at other times, etc.

For Halal certification, the level of inspection varies. Little on-site Muslim inspection is required in a Halal approved plant operating with Halal approved production procedures and ingredients. However, whenever slaughter is involved, a Muslim must slaughter every animal to

qualify as Halal. In a plant that runs both Halal and non-Halal products, the Muslim inspector must:

- assure that only Halal items are used
- determine if any ingredients contain any meat or alcohol-based ingredients or by-products
- assure the cleanliness of all equipment to be used
- inspect all packaging to be used
- require an accounting of all packaging used and remaining after production, and
- perform a special and intense cleaning, if pork products were ever processed on the equipment to be used in production.

Marketing Considerations

Marketing decisions require a clear definition of the goal, target consumers, and products by the marketing department. One approach is to add Halal certification production standards to an existing product line. In this case, the Halal certification is obtained as a product differentiation strategy or to keep up with the competition. In this case, the marketers will continue to mass-market the products as if there were no religious certification. These items are found in general product categories within grocery stores, side-by-side with non-certified, competitor products and is the largest market segment alternative.

A second approach is to introduce a product that is strictly marketed as a Halal food item. In this case, it is not mass-marketed, but rather targeted to specific consumers. It has a much smaller consumer base, making it a niche product. Examples include frozen Halal airline dinners



and shelf stable meals for institutional use. These items are usually found in a specialty or ethnic food section of the grocery store or are demanded by institutions requiring them for specific customers. For example, J&M Company met the small, niche demand of the US military for strict Halal meals with its products and rations, by creating the first commercial ration in the US Military's history and by-passing military logistics systems to direct deliver them to the field. Choices made about production practices, suppliers, and supervisory organizations could dramatically affect the success of specialty products. But if the brand and products are good and the certification is authentic, they will command a very strong and loyal following.

A third approach is to take a general product and market it to the Halal consumer. In this case, a popular branded item may add Halal certification so that it is also acceptable to the Halal observant consumer. Halal certification is a necessity for marketing to the Muslim community, domestically and internationally. It is also a marketing strategy for increasing sales. The emergence of proper Halal certification for successful and continued international trade opens new marketing opportunities. In today's competitive environment, doing it "right from the start" is most important because an unforgiving market may not afford you a second chance.

I hope our experience will make your entry into the Halal food market easier and rewarding.



R e c i p e o f t h e M o n t h

The recipe for July comes to us from FAO in Missouri. The recipe is for:

Mnazlit Batinjan (Eggplant & Garbanzo Stew)

Ingredient List:

- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 can garbanzo beans, drained
- 1 large eggplant, peeled & cut into wedges
- 3 fresh tomatoes, peeled & diced
- 1 hot pepper (optional)
- salt & pepper to taste

Preparation:

Sauté onions in olive oil. Add beans and eggplant, add seasonings. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Gently toss the vegetable with the lid on. Then add tomatoes and a little water. (The liquid should come to half the depth of the vegetables.) Cook on medium temperature until the eggplant is done. This dish may be served hot or cold. Serves 4-6. Sah-tayn.

Send your recipes to Halal Digest at regional@ifanca.org

