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Eating and Drinking in Islam

## "Halal" Labels Experiencing a Supermarket Boom

**More and more Muslims are leading their everyday lives in harmony with the Koran, Sunna and Sharia. This also goes for the meals they put on the table. Worldwide, no segment is growing more rapidly in the food market than "halal." By Peter Ziegler**

The "halal" label stands for food that is in conformance with the rules of Islam. These items are being marketed today just as profitably as organic foods.



Halal food boom in France: Burger King Muslim restaurant in Clichy-sous-Bois near Paris

Producers and restaurateurs can also obtain certification in the countries of the EU. The applicable standards for "halal food" were established and are implemented by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

They are also an issue in Turkey's negotiations to join the EU. The Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs (SANCO), which is in charge of this area in the EU, has drawn attention to the Islamic method for the ritual slaughtering of animals and is trying to bring Islamic law into harmony with animal rights and the exigencies of global competition.

Companies exporting food into Islamic countries are well advised to obtain certification for their products. This goes especially for the hotly contested meat market and for the deep-pocketed Muslim consumers in the Gulf States, the USA, Canada and Great Britain.

"Halal food" was the leading theme at "Gulfood 2007" in Dubai, and this may be the key marketplace for Islamically acceptable food. Malaysia, which will host visitors at the "MIHAS 2007" trade fair.

### Flexible interpretation

The Arab word "halal" means "permissible." In English, it refers only to food and food products. In Arabic, this term is used to refer to all things and acts that are allowed in accordance with the Koran, Sunna and Sharia. In simple terms, "halal food" is the Islamic equivalent of food that is "kosher" in accordance with the tenets of the Jewish faith.

Where both the Torah and Talmud contain precisely formulated commandments and prohibitions, however, the rules for Muslims can be interpreted more flexibly. This even applies to the ritual slaughter of animals for food, which is governed by strict laws in both religions.

By contrast to the Orthodox Rabbis, the majority of Islamic lawyers today accept the compromise that an animal may be stunned before slaughter using high voltage current.

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However, most British Muslims reject this concession and have therefore created their own label.

The British constitution guarantees Jews and Muslims traditional slaughtering, even in industrial slaughterhouses. But there are a series of different "halal" labels as a result of differing interpretations of the Sharia.

### Globally valid "halal" definitions

German consumers will be reminded of the early days of "organic" labels, which were often affixed by the producer itself. The United Nations "Codex Alimentarius Commission" has in the meantime instituted globally valid "halal" definitions and set down industry standards. These were based on Malaysian expertise, which is generally recognized and applied.

The "halal" label from Kuala Lumpur requires a thorough quality inspection for health and hygiene and prescribes a procedure for slaughtering in accordance with Islamic rules while also observing animal rights. Quality, hygiene and the safety of raw materials, ingredients and products are attested.



"Beurger King Muslim" - after Mecca Cola, a Muslim alternative to the popular soft drink launched in France, a Muslim burger restaurant opened in the country with Europe's largest Islamic community

This broad-based system not only certifies meat and poultry products, but also encompasses other consumer goods such as medications, toiletries, cosmetics and candy. This is designed to preclude the use of forbidden ingredients, for example pork by-products or alcohol.

Parallel with this certification, global production standards such as ISO 9000 or "Good Hygienic Practice" (GHP) are being introduced.

With almost 1.8 billion Muslims in the world today, the World Halal Forum (WHF) estimates the value of the halal market at some 150 billion USD. Measuring by current demographic trends, the "Highbeam Research" group foresees potential growth that will bring the total up to 500 billion USD by the year 2010.

### Growing market

"The halal marketplace is set to become one of the most profitable and influential arenas in the food industry," predicts Salama Evans, speaker for WHF. There are abundant opportunities both inside and outside traditional Muslim countries, with the halal market in Great Britain alone harboring a potential for 4 billion USD in sales.

The major producers are Malaysia, Brazil and Turkey, all of which have introduced halal standards for every link in the production chain. Most of the world's leading meat producers – Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, New Zealand, Great Britain and the USA – integrate certified slaughtering techniques into their production process.

And it pays off: although a US ally in Iraq, Australia nevertheless managed to increase its meat exports to the Gulf States by an incredible 59% last year.

The suppliers from "down under" offer both beef and lamb



The **Amana Media Initiative** informs on the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the many issues faced by Muslim communities within Asia. [Click here for more...](#)

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that is not only of excellent quality but is also produced under the most stringent food controls in the world, including a government-supervised slaughtering process in conformance with Islamic rules for meat sold under the halal label.

Halal meat is also booming in France. In metropolises with a large Muslim population, such as Marseille, Muhlhouse in Alsace and in the outskirts of Paris, hypermarkets like Carrefour have quadrupled shelf space for products labeled "halal."

In Germany, the Muslim market is still very small and largely in the hands of immigrants from Turkey or Lebanon. The few German exhibitors at "Gulfood 2007" were mostly involved in systems technology, such as in the "German Baker Street."

Market leader in issuing recognized "halal" certificates in Germany is a private company in Bremen. It charges two to three thousand euros a year for every product certified. Fish certificates are the most expensive; unlike the Sunnis, the Shiites forbid any variety of fish without fins, such as eel.

*Peter Ziegler*

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*Translated from the German by Jennifer Taylor-Gaida*

**Letter to the Editor**

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Beurger King Muslim

#### **In Clichy-sous-Bois it's "Bacon Halal" instead of "Le Big Mac"**

Parisian Muslims can now enjoy halal meals in an atmosphere that mimics US fast-food joints after BKM, or Beurger King Muslim, opened its doors. Gertrud Sterzl reports

The Karmez Company

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Eid ul Adha – Festival of Sacrifice

#### **Muslims, Activists Lock Horns on Animal Slaughter**

The Festival of Sacrifice is held by Muslims around the world each year at the end of the Haj. But what is one of the Muslim world's most joyous periods, is an annual thorn in the side of German animal right activists. Mark Caldwell reports

Published: 30.03.2007 - Last modified: 30.03.2007

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