

ANIMAL HANDLING: RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER

(Much of the information in this fact sheet is derived from “Slaughter,” Meat Focus International, by Temple Grandin, Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University and Joe M. Regenstein, Cornell Kosher Food Initiative, Department of Food Science, Cornell University, as well as from “The Kosher and Halal Food Laws,” by Joe M. Regenstein, Muhammad M. Chaudry, Islamic Food and Nutrition Council and Carrie Regenstein, University of Wisconsin, 2003.)

Most meat produced in federally inspected plants in the U.S. is produced under the Humane Slaughter Act of 1978. However, when Congress originally passed a similar law in 1958, it recognized that some of the law’s requirements would conflict with the religious slaughter practices that are a part of the Jewish and Muslim traditions. The Humane Slaughter Act acknowledges that Kosher and Halal slaughter can be performed humanely.

Just as animal welfare practices have changed throughout the meat industry as a whole, religious slaughter practices have evolved in recent years.

Below is a summary of the origins of religious slaughter practices and some of the changes that have been made.

Kosher Slaughter

Slaughter performed under Jewish law is referred to as Kosher slaughter. The basic requirement for Kosher slaughter is found in the first five books of the Bible, but is codified in more detail in a text known as the Talmud, which represents the writing down of oral laws that were passed by G-d [Jewish tradition in writing] to Moses with the Ten Commandments. The text includes detailed anatomical information to instruct Jews about the slaughter process and how to inspect the animal immediately after slaughter to ensure that animals are healthy and fit for consumption.

Kosher dietary laws address three issues:

1. **Allowed animals** – Ruminants with split hooves that chew their cud, the traditional domestic birds and fish with fins and removable scales are generally permitted. Pigs, wild birds (including ratites), sharks, dogfish, catfish, monkfish and similar species, as well as crustacean and molluscan shellfish are prohibited. Most insects are also not considered kosher.
2. **Prohibition of blood**
3. **Prohibition of the mixing of milk and meat**

There are two primary differences between Kosher slaughter and standard slaughter. Kosher slaughter is performed by a specially trained person known as a “Shochet.” The Shochet performs the slaughter process using a long, razor-sharp knife known as a “chalef” that renders the animal insensible to pain with a single cut. In contrast to non-religious slaughter, the animal is not stunned prior to slaughter.

In processing Kosher meat, certain veins and arteries must be carefully removed, as well as the sciatic nerve. The meat is then soaked, salted, and rinsed following a strict time schedule to remove additional blood.

Halal Slaughter

Halal dietary laws, found in the Quran, address four key issues:

1. **Prohibited and permitted animals** – the meat of pigs, boars and swine is strictly prohibited, as is meat of carnivorous animals like lions, tigers, dogs, cats and birds of prey. Meat of domesticated animals with a split hoof, like cattle, sheep, goat, lamb, buffalo and camel, are permitted. Birds that do not use their claws to hold down food, like chickens and turkeys, may be consumed. Laws governing foods from the sea are more varied under Muslim law. Eggs and milk from permitted animals may be consumed. Unlike Kosher, there is no prohibition on mixing milk and meat.
2. **Prohibition of blood** – blood from permitted or non-permitted animals may not be consumed.
3. **Prohibition of intoxicants** – alcohol may not be consumed under Muslim law.
4. **Method of slaughter** — Islam emphasizes the gentle treatment of animals, especially before and during slaughter. Animals dying due to strangulation or falls, and animals dedicated to other religions are forbidden under the Quran. In addition, any Muslim may slaughter his own animal by invoking the name of Allah, the one God, [it is the same G-d as the Christian and Jewish] but the animal generally may not be stunned prior to slaughter. Halal slaughter involves cutting the throat in a manner that induces rapid and complete bleeding and the quickest death possible.

Muslim slaughter is ideally carried out by a practicing Muslim. However, the Quran also speaks of accepting the meat of “people of the book,” which means Jews and Christians. Halal slaughter may not be carried out on an animal dedicated to another religion. Like Kosher slaughter, animals are not ordinarily stunned prior to slaughter. Unlike Kosher meat production, Halal meat is not deveined, soaked or salted.

Animal Welfare Innovations

The North American Meat Institute Foundation’s guidelines recommend that all religious slaughter be performed on animals in the upright position. Historically, to meet regulatory requirements, Kosher and Halal animals were hoisted prior to slaughter, a practice that can be extremely stressful, especially for larger animals like cattle.

Today, however, most religiously slaughtered cattle in U.S. plants are slaughtered in an upright position. Specially designed upright restraint devices have now found widespread acceptance in the religious communities. These restraints enable religious officials to perform a cut swiftly and painlessly that causes rapid unconsciousness while the animal is standing. Once the cut is performed and the animal is unconscious, it can then be hoisted. Some Muslims are accepting a “reversible head only” type of stunning which causes temporary unconsciousness. This type of stunning is only acceptable to Muslims if

it allows an animal to regain consciousness within a minute and to eat within five minutes. This process is adequate to ensure that animals are insensible to pain, if only temporarily.

The Kosher and Halal Market

The Kosher market according to Integrated Marketing, the U.S. market for Kosher foods overall is estimated at more than \$100 billion. In 2008, “kosher” was the most frequent claim on new products, according to Mintel. In fact, 28 percent of new U.S. food and beverage launches carried a Kosher symbol. Mintel valued the market for Kosher certified prepared food, as well as kosher meat, dairy and fish, at \$12.5 billion in 2008, an increase of 64 percent on 2003. In 2009, a Mintel report indicated that just 14 percent of survey respondents purchased Kosher because they follow Kosher rules. Sixty-two percent bought Kosher for perceived quality.

The Halal market in the U.S. is emerging as a growing market. The number of Muslims in North America is estimated at just under eight million people with an estimated one billion Muslims living worldwide. No estimates are currently available on the size of the Halal food market in the U.S.

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