Contents

Message 1

2

Message
Minister of Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumer Affairs Malaysia

The Chief Executive Officer - TM Info-Media Sdn Bhd

Foreword by Rector 8
International Islamic University Malaysia About IUM Halal Industry Research Centre

Advertisers' Index 10
The Importance Of Halal In Islamic Law And Muslim Life 12
Fundamental Principles and Cardinal Values Pertaining to Human Welfare

Halal Meats And Frozen Foods: 18
The Halal Abattoir, Packaging, Storage And Handling

Halal Audit: An Overview 26
Ensuring Compliance to Processes Toward Producing Halal Products

Halal Food Seminar 09 31
Halal Processed Food And Beverages 32
Some Concerns on Food Additives and Ingredients

"Vegette Gelatin", Why Not? 36
Extensive Research to Explore the Potential of Malaysian Plants

General Guidelines For Halal Food Preparation 38
Unified Standard of Halal Certification is Important to Globalize Halal Products

Halal Food Analysis 44
Ensuring Food and Other Consumer Goods to be Authentically Halal

Halal Cosmeceuticals: The Vogue And The Vague 50
Are Halal and Tuyyiba Aspects of Cosmetic Products Being Overlooked?

Halal Issues In Pharmaceutical Products 56
Urgent Need to Have Modern and Efficient Production of Pharmaceuticals and Biopharmaceuticals

Synthetic Bone As A Solution For Halal Bone Grafts Implantation 64
Demand For Bone Graft Has Been Increasing Steadily

Muslin-friendly Facilities In The Hospitality Industry 70
Offering Facilities in Accordance With Religious Tenets

The Dire Need For A Portal On Halal Matters 76
A One-Stop Source of Information On the Concept of Halal?

Istihalah (Transformation Of Things) & Halal Industry 82
Not Based Upon What It Was, But Based Upon What It Is

Commenda Partnership (Mudarabah) – An Overview 88
Justice and Fairness in Undertaking Business Rewards and Risks

An Overview Of The Brunei Halal Industry 90
A 253-hectare Agro Technology Park to facilitate local and foreign halal businesses

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Halal Food Analysis
Ensuring Food and Other Consumer Goods to be Authentically Halal

Introduction

Halal is an Islamic term for anything that is ‘permissible or lawful’ and the term comes from the Holy Qur’an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Haram, also an Islamic term, means ‘unlawful or prohibited’. In relation to food and other consumer products, halal means ‘permissible for consumption and used by Muslims’ whereas haram is just the opposite. Examples from the Qur’an pertaining to halal are:

"O ye people! Eat of what is on earth, Halal and good: and do not follow the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy." (Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah:2 verse 168) and

"O ye who believe! Forbid not the good thing which Allah hath made Halal for you, and transgress not. Lo! Allah loveth not transgressors. Eat of that which Allah hath bestowed on you as food Halal and good, and keep your duty to Allah in Whom ye are believers." (Qur’an, Surah Al-Maidah:5 verses 87 and 88).

Ensuring food and other consumer goods to be authentically halal is paramount for Muslims. Halal should involve approval of all ingredients and all food processing at any stage of the production – the concept of from farm to mouth. Bearing in mind that Muslim population is about 1.6 billion worldwide, many companies are looking at halal concept as a new tool for marketing.
It is also very important to know that in Islam, food should be halal and toiyib (permissible and good/wholesome) as mentioned in a number of Qur’anic verses. Halal food in the contemporary food industry means that the food is of high quality and safety, and conforms to international standards such as food safety according to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) and of course it should be permitted under the Islamic Shariah law.

Challenges in Halal Food Analysis

It is very challenging and increasingly difficult for Muslims to ensure the halal status of food in the market due to the diversification of sources acquired globally for food processing and production. This trend has raised concerns among Muslim consumers regarding processed food. Adulteration of value-added food products - involving the replacement of high cost ingredients with lower grade and cheaper substitutes can be very attractive and lucrative for food manufacturers or raw material suppliers. Many fraudulent and deception cases were reported worldwide involving adulteration of haram ingredients in halal food (especially porcine-based products).

In other cases, non-halal contaminants got introduced in the final food products unintentionally.

Halal food is a sensitive and serious matter to Muslims. With many fraudulent issues around and cases of unintentional non-halal contaminants in food, more stringent monitoring should be established by the competent certification authorities. Authentication and verification for halal has become one of the major challenges in analysis of processed food. At present, very limited analytical methods are available for halal food verification.

Rapid, sensitive, reliable and yet affordable methods are urgently needed for halal food verification and for detection of non-halal components (e.g. porcine origin) in food products.

Muslims acknowledge the importance of knowledge, intellect and reasons in leading a meaningful lifestyle. Having pointed this crucial viewpoint,
Muslims should not look for scientific evidence behind all commandments that come from the Creator before deciding to accept and adopt these injunctions in his/her lifestyle. Muslims should obey these commandments as a matter of worship (ibadah). As an example, Islamic teachings prohibited the consumption of blood of any type and consider it haram, a long time before chemical analysis showed that blood contains chemical substances that can be injurious to human health such as uric acid.

**Current Analytical Methods that can be used for Halal Food Authentication**

- **Gas Chromatography – FAC/FAME and TAG Analysis**
  
  Gas-liquid chromatography (GLC), or simply gas chromatography (GC), is a common type of chromatography used in organic chemistry for separating and analyzing compounds that can be vaporized without decomposition. Typical uses of GC were for the determinations of non-Halal ingredients in food or for the analysis of toxicity, which makes the food non-tayyib, i.e. non-halal.

- **Gas Chromatography – Mass Spectroscopy (GC-MS)**

  It is similar as GC (above), however it is more accurate, reliable and fast since two techniques (GC and MS) are integrated to form a single powerful method for analyzing mixtures of chemicals. Nowadays, a GC-MS equipment is connected to a computer and use advance software that allows building a library of the structures of targeted compounds to be analyzed.

- **Microscopic Determinations**

  It had been used for the determination of non-halal leather in products. It also has the potential to be used for the determination of non-halal food products.

- **Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) Spectroscopy**

  FTIR spectroscopy could be used to analyze food samples such as animal fats, chocolate, cake, and biscuits for the presence of non-Halal ingredients such as lard. Analyses include characterizing and identifying the differences in FTIR spectra.
profiles. FTIR spectroscopy with chemometric analysis offered rapid, simple, reliable and environmentally friendly analytical technique that can detect and quantify low level of lard adulterated food samples (3 - 5% detection limit).

- **Electronic Nose (E-Nose) Technology**
E-Nose is a newly introduced analytical instrument that provides rapid, early identification and quantification of atmospheric changes caused by chemical species to which it has been trained. E-Nose can also be used to monitor cleanup processes after a leak or a spill. Studies have showed that E-Nose can be used as a rapid detection of non-halal food contaminants in the food matrix by characterizing simple and complex odors.

Furthermore, the potential of E-Nose technology to sense the presence of pathogens in humans can contribute to the early detection of diseases. Recently, medical applications of electronic noses have been explored. The use of a novel electronic nose to diagnose the presence of aflatoxins and other mycotoxins in food or feeding stuff is of great potential.

- **Molecular Biology Approaches**
  - Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)
  - DNA-sequencing

Molecular biology techniques are commonly employed in research and service laboratories around the world. The PCR technique can be used to verify, certify and monitor most animal proteins and related products for halal authentication efficiently and effectively as well as some other consumer products.

- **Chemical Testing**
Traditional wet chemical testing has been used in many laboratories to determine food quality. Many chemists rely on wet chemical methods, however these methods are considered to be non-environmentally friendly as many of these chemicals are hazardous to living things as well as the environment.

Testing of packaging material and microbial testing are also important for any type of raw material, food or feeding stuff and its of great importance for packed food as it can easily spread by local and/or international trading.

Exchange of technical expertise in laboratory analysis of halal food and sharing the information and data will help communities of practice in the food industry to enhance the capacity for halal food product development.

### Halal R&D in Malaysia

Research and development are meant to help producers and processors to verify the technical aspects of Halal food production, certification of food ingredients and additives, as well as find alternatives to existing non-halal or doubtful (shubhah or mashbooh) ingredients and food processing aids. The scientific advice in food production especially in terms of Halal interpretations could also influence market potentials and business opportunities along the entire Halal food value chain.

A number of institutions such as the Halal Products Research Institute (HPRI), UPM and Halal Industry Research Centre (HIRCen), IIUM along with other Malaysian agencies are able to consolidate and integrate the opportunities to optimize resources and increase competitiveness to contribute towards the goal to develop Malaysia as an international Hub for Halal products and services.