Handbook of Halal Food Production

Mian N. Riaz, Muhammad M. Chaudry

Labeling, Packaging, and Coatings for Halal Foods

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Mian N. Riaz, Munir M. Chaudry
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This chapter deals with some aspects of food production that wrap around the food in different ways. These varied aspects might seem unrelated and out of place, but these are issues that affect the halal status of foods and the labeling of products for Muslim markets.

- Halal labeling and printing issues
- Packaging food in a halal environment
- Packaging materials and containers
- Waxes, coatings, and edible films

### LABELING PRODUCTS FOR THE MUSLIM MARKET

Label benefits are for consumers and, therefore, should be descriptive, clear, and meaningful. Halal packaged products should have the brand name of the product, minimum matrix content information of manufacture ingredient list, a code that represent the batch information, manufacturer and expiry date, and most importantly, the halal logo from a recognized certified agency (Soong, 2007).

Usually, the ingredient label does not list the origin of the ingredients. Other ingredients, such as processing aids, anticaking agents, carriers, and incidental ingredients from various sources, are also not labeled (Potter and Hotchkiss, 1995). These issues create problems for Muslim consumers. For example, in Europe, manufacturers can use up to 5% vegetable or animal fat in products labeled as pure chocolate. Thus, halal certification of the product and proper halal markings and logos on products are the only way that consumers can be certain a product is halal. Reading of a product label unfortunately is not usually sufficient to determine that a processed product is acceptable (Talib et al., 2010).
If alcohol is a part of the food formulation, then alcohol must be included on the label as an ingredient. If alcohol is found naturally or is a carrier of other ingredients, then it is an incidental ingredient and is not labeled. Some incidental additives may still be present in foods at insignificant levels. If they do not have any technical or functional effect in the food, they are exempt from food labeling requirements (Riaz, 1997). By looking for certified halal products, Muslims no longer need to learn a list of mysterious E-numbers in Europe or chemical jargon in the U.S. each time they go shopping. Even then, the halal status of the manufacturing equipment and of other ingredients that are not labeled make it questionable to ever determine if a product is halal without a halal marking or specific guidance from the appropriate halal authorities (Rezai et al., 2012).

The voluntary information provided by food companies includes the religious symbols used to indicate that the product has qualified for halal and kosher certification. Figure 23.1 shows a sample label with halal markings and Figure 23.2 shows one that is dual halal and kosher certified.

Some commercial label terminology might actually confuse Muslim consumers. “Red wine vinegar” might be a positive gourmet statement in Western countries, but it is not viewed favorably by Muslim consumers. Although there is no wine or significant amount of alcohol left in this product, some people might mistakenly think that all derivatives of alcohol/wine are haram and might not purchase a product containing wine vinegar (red or white). It is better to label the ingredients as flavored vinegar in these countries if permitted by the country’s rules.

FIGURE 23.1 Typical meat product with halal logo.
If manufacturers want to attract additional consumers, such as Muslim, Jewish, vegetarian, and vegan, then labeling the source of ingredients that can be obtained from both animal and plants sources would increase the chances that a consumer might purchase these products. However, the best option available to the company is to have the product certified as halal, kosher, vegetarian, or vegan by a reputable organization. Additionally, if the target market is other than English-speaking customers, it might be beneficial to make the labels bilingual or even multilingual, including the marking of the halal-certifying agency. Note that if a label includes languages other than English, in the U.S., there are rules concerning what mandatory information required on a label must then also be presented in the additional language(s) (Mohammed et al., 2008). However, just putting the certification logo on the package in multiple languages does not require the use of additional languages elsewhere on the label.

**LABELS AND PRINTING DIRECTLY ON FOOD PRODUCTS**

Paper and plastic labels, glue used for pressure-sensitive labels, hot-melt glues, and edible printing dyes used directly on food are of concern because they might contain ingredients that would not be permissible in halal food. These may migrate into the food in minute quantities (Uddin, 1994). This may raise a question about its halal status that will require a decision by the halal certifier. The decision in these cases may differ with different halal-certifying agencies. These are just the type of issues that lead to lack of acceptability of products from some certifying agencies by other...
certifying agencies. Such problems can be avoided by avoiding using such materials in the first place.

PACKAGING FOOD IN A HALAL ENVIRONMENT

In North America, halal food products are generally made in facilities that also produce non-halal products. Most of the workers in the production areas are non-Muslim, who are not familiar with halal (Minkus-McKenna, 2007). Manufacturers can work with their halal certifying agency to establish standard operating procedures to accommodate halal production requirements:

- Keeping halal products in a separate room
- Scheduling production to avoid cross-contamination
- Not switching workers from non-halal to halal packing areas
- Properly marking areas to identify halal production
- Ensuring that workers do not bring personal food into production areas, wash their hands before entering the facility, and so on

PACKAGING MATERIALS AND CONTAINERS

Some packaging materials are questionable with regard to their halal status. In some cases, stearates, which can be of animal or vegetable origin are used in the production of plastic bags and containers. Waxes and coatings applied to plastic, paper, and Styrofoam cups and plates might contain animal fats that are used following any very hot production stage that would be hot enough to nullify any animal products used prior to that step. Each halal certifying agency would currently have to determine what that temperature is, although hopefully this is one of those issues that might be standardized in the future. Metal cans and drums can be contaminated with animal fats. Formation, rolling, and cutting of steel sheets to make containers requires the use of oils to aid in their manufacturing and protect the steel during transportation. Such oils can also be animal derived (Cannon, 1990). Steel drums, which are often reused, can be used to carry foods containing pork or pork fat, which, despite rigorous cleaning practices, might be retained in small amounts to contaminate halal products otherwise thought pure or where the cleaning process, even if rigorous, does not meet halal requirements.

EDIBLE COATING AND EDIBLE FILMS

Although the use of edible films in food products seems new, their use in the food industry actually started many years ago. In England, during the 16th century, larding, that is, coating food products with fat, was used to prevent moisture loss in foods (Labuza and Contrereas-Medellin, 1981). Currently, edible films and coatings are being used in a variety of applications, including casing for sausages, chocolate coating for nuts and fruits, and wax coating for fruits and vegetables.
As the food industry develops edible films and coatings, it will be important for it to understand how some of their choices will affect the halal status of food products. This is particularly true for products that traditionally do not have an ingredient label and cannot be easily certified, such as fruits and vegetables. The Nutritional Labeling and Education Act has a series of regulations dealing with potential coatings of fruits and vegetables, including a mandatory label on packing boxes and signage at the point of sale. The wording of the labels was designed to give consumers meaningful category information, for example, vegetable, mineral, petroleum, lac-resin (shellac), or animal-based ingredients. All these categories except animal-based ingredients are acceptable for halal coatings. In addition, many consumers do not expect to find “animal” products on fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. Thus, the selection of materials appropriate for these products in particular is important (Regenstein and Chaudry, 2002). The supermarket industry in the U.S. has actively promoted keeping animal-based ingredients out of such products. However, in other countries such products might still contain animal-based products.

REFERENCES


