

6 From Spice Routes to Your Grill: The Global Journey of Halal Flavors

10 Zabihah vs. Halal: Is "Halal" Not Enough?

14 Sweetness Overload: Taming Sugar Cravings

Winter 2025

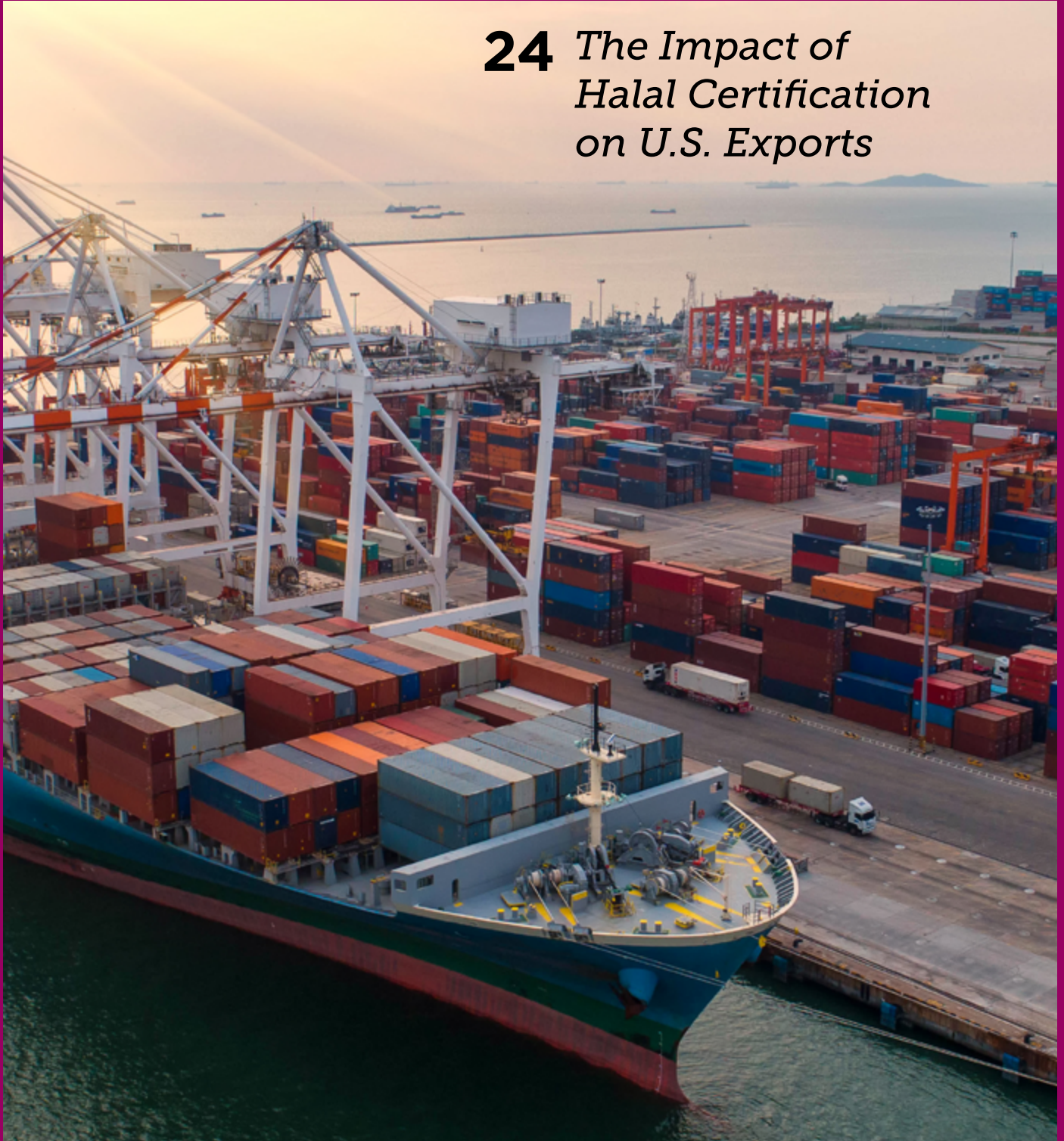
73

Halal Consumer

A Publication of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America

Magazine

24 *The Impact of Halal Certification on U.S. Exports*



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A Global Leader In Halal Services

IFANCA is a not-for-profit organization committed to helping consumers and industry source authentic halal products since 1982. Our registered Crescent-M halal service mark assures consumers the product is halal without a doubt! IFANCA halal certification means your products meet the dietary requirements of over 1.8 billion consumers.

Mission

Promote halal by helping industries produce halal-certified products, increasing awareness through education, and building and supporting institutions.

Values

- **Service** - We are a resource to everyone looking to learn about halal.
- **Integrity** - As a trusted authority on halal, we have a moral commitment to do what is right without compromise.
- **Adaptability** - We are continually listening and evolving to overcome challenges and meet the needs of everyone we work with.

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- **Halal certification** - IFANCA is a leader in halal certification.
- **Education and awareness** - From certification to community building, we approach all our work from a place of expertise and engagement.
- **Building and supporting institutions** - We strive to best serve humanity by promoting food and health security and nutrition equity through local and global partnerships, empowering other established institutions, and uplifting religious and scientific voices.

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By fostering key partnerships with influential organizations like UNICEF, the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the National Association of College and University Food Services, we actively address pressing concerns such as food insecurity, nutrition inequity, health insecurity, and health inequity. Through our commitment to high halal certification standards and impactful collaborations, we aim to create a healthier, more inclusive world for all.

Accreditations and recognition

We're globally accepted. Our accredited certification process is recognized and trusted by the world's Muslim majority countries.

Accredited by



Recognized by



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- Notes from IFANCA
- Articles, Resources, and Recipes
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Table of Contents

- 4 Editor's Note
- 5 From the Publisher's Desk

FOOD TRENDS

- 6 From Spice Routes to Your Grill: The Global Journey of Halal Flavors
- 10 Zabihah vs. Halal: Is "Halal" Not Enough?

HEALTH & WELLNESS

- 14 Sweetness Overload: Taming Sugar Cravings

SPOTLIGHT

- 18 Company of the Year: Kerry

RECIPES

- 20 Keta Salmon with Za'atar and Sumac
- 21 Tandoori Chicken Tacquitos
- 22 Thai Chili Mango Salad with Chicken
- 23 Mini Rasmalai Milk Cakes

FEATURES

- 24 The Impact of Halal Certification on U.S. Exports
- 28 Business With Integrity: How Islamic Ethics Shape the Halal Economy

FITNESS

- 32 Gut Health in Motion
- 36 Halal-Certified Product Locator

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ABOUT HALAL CONSUMER

Halal Consumer is a publication of IFANCA (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America). IFANCA is a non-profit Islamic organization with the mission to promote halal food and the institution of halal. IFANCA objectives include making halal foods conveniently available, introducing halal to food companies and institutions, creating awareness of halal among consumers, and providing halal solutions to consumer needs.

DESIGNED BY Annan Shehadi
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Editor's Note

Assalaamu alaikum,

From the caravans of merchants departing Makkah to the bustling trade routes along the Silk Road, global trade has long been the foundation of growth and exchange. These historic networks shaped nations, influenced cultures, and connected communities across continents.

In this issue of *Halal Consumer*, we explore the many dimensions of trade—from its early history to its modern-day impact. Did you know that Morocco was the first country to establish trade relations with the United States, even before American independence? This early partnership illustrates the enduring influence of the Muslim world in global commerce. Our feature article, “The Impact of Halal Certification on U.S. Exports,” revisits this connection and its continued relevance today, highlighting IFANCA’s role in maintaining halal standards across global supply chains, including innovations in the dairy industry.

Ethical and environmental considerations have become essential in today’s interconnected economy. “Business with Integrity: How Islamic Ethics Shape the Halal Economy” examines how corporations are addressing sustainability, fair practices, and consumer confidence in an increasingly global marketplace. Our Spotlight features Kerry, a global leader in taste and nutrition solutions, recognized as IFANCA’s 2025 Company of the Year for its unwavering commitment to halal integrity, innovation, and meeting the needs of consumers worldwide.

Global accreditation and recognition bodies operate with rigorous frameworks to uphold standards, build trust, and promote transparency. However, their approaches may differ in certain aspects. “Zabihah vs. Halal: Is ‘Halal’ Not Enough?” explores these distinctions and the diverse methodologies used by authorities worldwide.

Spices from around the world have long shaped regional cuisines, with each culture adding its own distinctive twist on flavors and preparation techniques. “From Spice Routes to Your Grill: The Global Journey of Halal Flavors” shows how these tastes spread across continents, evolved through cultural exchange, and inspire our own cross-cultural fusion recipes, including Keta Salmon with Za’atar and Sumac, Tandoori Chicken Taquitos, Thai Chili Mango Salad with Chicken, and Mini Rasmalai Milk Cakes.

While we celebrate these occasional indulgences, it is important to take care of our health. “Sweetness Overload: Taming Sugar Cravings” explains why we crave sweets and strategies to manage indulgence. In “Gut Health in Motion,” learn how simple post-meal exercises and gentle physical activity can support digestion, ease discomfort, and promote overall balance.

From influencing industries and guiding trade to upholding integrity in global halal standards, this issue reflects IFANCA’s commitment to meeting the evolving needs of Muslim consumers in the U.S. and around the world.

For the latest IFANCA and *Halal Consumer* magazine updates, follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#). We always love hearing from our readers—please share your thoughts and feedback at halalconsumer@ifanca.org.

Sincerely,
Zehra Jafri, Editor

From the Publisher's Desk

Assalaamu alaikum,

In 2025, the United States is undergoing significant regulatory changes, many of which have global implications. One of the most closely watched developments is the revision of trade tariffs on imported goods.

President Donald Trump has introduced substantial adjustments to these tariffs, particularly in terms of the percentage rates applied to imports. This has sparked international attention, with many countries initiating discussions with the U.S. to negotiate mutually beneficial tariff arrangements.

However, the conversation goes beyond just numbers. The heightened public interest has led many to seek a deeper understanding of how tariffs are determined. One key source of insight is the [Foreign Trade Barriers Report](#), published annually by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). This report is publicly accessible through the official [USTR website](#) and outlines the various factors considered by the U.S. in setting trade policies—including those related to Halal products and their certification.

For over a decade, Halal products and certification have been a recurring topic in the USTR's reports. Initially, the focus was limited to a few countries such as Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Qatar. But over time, the scope has expanded significantly, as reflected in the 2025 report. This growing attention from the U.S. government underscores the increasing relevance of the global Halal market. It's no longer limited to food and beverages—it now includes pharmaceuticals and other sectors. Ultimately, all products aiming to enter this market must meet its specific requirements, including Halal compliance.

At IFANCA, we are committed to supporting U.S. industries in gaining access to global markets, particularly the Halal segment. As a U.S.-based Halal certification body serving over 5,000 domestic and international manufacturing plants, we continuously adapt to the evolving regulatory landscape. Our goal is to ensure that Halal certificates issued by IFANCA are recognized and accepted worldwide.

We believe that the challenges posed by Halal certification as a potential trade barrier can be overcome through strong collaboration between certification bodies, government agencies, and industry stakeholders. IFANCA remains steadfast in its commitment to playing an active role in the dynamic global Halal market.

Sincerely,
Muhammad Munir Chaudry, PhD
President

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From Spice Routes to Your Grill: The Global Journey of Halal Flavors



ACROSS MUSLIM CULTURES, FEASTS AND gatherings often begin with the sizzle of meat on a hot grill. Whether it is a family dinner in Cairo, a street-side kebab stall in Istanbul, or a backyard barbecue in Chicago, the aroma of marinated meat connects people across continents and centuries. The modern halal grill—rich with history, faith, and flavor—is the result of a remarkable culinary journey that began long before today's global halal market took shape.

The Origins of Halal Flavor

Centuries ago, Muslim traders carried not only silk and gold along ancient trade routes but also spices, recipes, and culinary traditions. From the bustling ports of the Arabian Peninsula to the spice islands of Southeast Asia, each region contributed new layers of taste and technique. Black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and coriander transformed simple grilled meats into rich, aromatic feasts. Yogurt, brought by Central Asian nomads, became an essential tenderizer, while the arrival of chili peppers from the Americas in the sixteenth century added heat and vibrancy to halal dishes from India to Indonesia.

As these flavors moved across continents, they evolved. In North Africa, spice rubs reflected the influence of Berber and Arab traders. In South Asia, yogurt-based marinades gave birth to tandoori traditions. Across the Middle East, skewered kebabs became symbols of hospitality and celebration. The story of halal grilling is therefore not just about taste, but about cultural exchange and innovation that spanned centuries.

From Trade Routes to Trust and Certification

The legacy of global trade continues today, but in a modern context where faith, science, and regulation intersect. In the late twentieth century, the growing demand for halal products in Western markets required more than traditional methods; it needed verification and trust. During the late 1980s, the Government of India invited a team of spice experts that included Dr. Muhammad Munir Chaudry, a food scientist working for Heller Spice Company, and President of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA), to help make Indian spice exports more reliable and acceptable to United States regulatory authorities. Their work helped establish scientific and certification standards that allowed spice and food exporters to meet both halal requirements and food safety expectations abroad.

Founded in 1982, IFANCA became one of the earliest global pioneers in halal certification, ensuring that ingredients, processing, and labeling met rigorous standards rooted in Islamic dietary laws. This leadership bridged the gap between ancient halal culinary practices and the modern global food system, enabling consumers world-

...a good marinade is not only about taste; it is a careful balance of acids, salts, and fats working together to tenderize, flavor, and caramelize the meat.



wide to trust the integrity of the halal label, from spice blends to ready-to-grill meats.

The Science Behind Marinades and Grilling

Behind every great halal grill lies an art that is deeply scientific. Harold McGee, in his acclaimed book *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (2004), explains that acidic ingredients and enzymes alter protein structures, allowing flavors to penetrate and heat to distribute evenly. Enzymes like papain (from papaya) and bromelain (from pineapple) help tenderize meat by breaking down muscle fibers, while salt enhances water retention, and fat helps carry fat-soluble spices.

When meat meets heat, another transformation occurs. The Maillard reaction, a process where amino acids and sugars combine, creates that signature brown crust and savory aroma we associate with expertly grilled foods. As Martins, Jongen, and van Boekel (2001) describe, it is the foundation of flavor development in cooked proteins. Thus, a good marinade is not only about taste; it is a careful balance of acids, salts, and fats working together to tenderize, flavor, and caramelize the meat.



Halal Grilling Essentials

Type of Meat	Cut	Texture	Best Marinade Type	How it Works
Chicken	Thighs, drumsticks	Moist, slightly fatty	Yogurt-based with spices	Yogurt tenderizes and clings to the meat, ideal for grill marks and moisture retention
Chicken	Breast (cubed or whole)	Lean, can dry out	Olive oil, lemon juice, herbs	Oil locks in moisture; acidity keeps it from drying
Beef	Ribeye or strip steak	Rich, marbled	Dry rub or light marinade	Doesn't need much help—just bold seasoning and a touch of garlic or mustard
Beef	Flank, skirt, sirloin tips	Tougher, fibrous	Vinegar, soy sauce, ginger, garlic	Acids and salt break down fibers; soy adds umami flavor
Lamb	Chops	Tender, slightly gamey	Mint, garlic, olive oil	Herbs and oil complement lamb's flavor without overpowering it
Lamb	Shoulder or leg (cubed)	Dense, needs time	Yogurt, turmeric, chili, lemon juice	Yogurt softens, spices cut the richness

Is Marinating Overnight Necessary?

While a few hours of marination can infuse flavor, overnight marination allows deeper penetration of spices and tenderizing acids. McGee notes that extended marination helps modify the protein structure, ensuring the final product is tender, juicy, and richly flavored. For most kababs, chicken, or lamb cuts, four to twelve hours is ideal, while tougher meats such as beef sirloin or lamb shoulder benefit from a full overnight soak. This slow process mirrors the patience that once defined spice traders' journeys; each step deliberate, each layer meaningful.

Kababs and Skewered Traditions

Across the Muslim world, kababs symbolize community and celebration. In Iraq, simple ground lamb with onion and parsley brings out the meat's natural character. Persian chelow kababs, infused with saffron and yogurt, deliver tender and aromatic bites. Turkish Adana kababs feature bold chili and garlic flavors, while Indian seekh kababs burst with cumin, coriander, and ginger. In Southeast Asia, satay skewers brushed with turmeric, lemongrass, and coconut milk offer a balance of spice and sweetness.

Modern Grills, Ancient Principles

Today, halal grilling has transcended borders. It is featured in high-end restaurants, street festivals, and backyard gatherings worldwide. Whether enjoyed as kababs in Karachi, lamb chops in Casablanca, or halal burgers in Chicago, these dishes unite cultures through shared traditions of hospitality and purity.

Organizations like IFANCA continue to ensure that this global exchange of flavors remains rooted in halal integrity. By certifying ingredients, supervising processing facilities, and guiding food manufacturers, IFANCA has safeguarded the trust that consumers place in halal products. This commitment preserves not only the spiritual values of halal but also the legacy of craftsmanship and care that define the global halal food movement.



From the spice routes of the ancient world to the halal-certified grills of today, the journey of flavor has been one of faith, trade, and science.

Conclusion

From the spice routes of the ancient world to the halal-certified grills of today, the journey of flavor has been one of faith, trade, and science. The halal grill is more than a method of cooking, it is a living tradition that connects centuries of Muslim innovation to modern culinary practice. Each sizzling kabab, each perfectly charred chop, is a story told through spice, trust, and certification. And thanks to pioneers like IFANCA and Dr. Chaudry, that story continues to be written with authenticity and global reach.

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MUHAMMAD YAHYA and **ZEHRA JAFRI** contributed to this article.



ZABIHAH VS. HALAL: Is “Halal” Not Enough?

By Dofactora Iskandar





IN THE DISCUSSION OF MUSLIM DIETARY PRACTICES, few terms spark as much debate as *halal* and *zabihah*. While both are rooted in Arabic, their meanings and usage have evolved differently over time—especially in North America. In fact, it is mainly in the United States and Canada where the two words are commonly used side by side to describe meat. This distinction, however, goes beyond language; it reflects the broader challenge of interpreting centuries-old religious principles within the modern food industry.

From Words to Practice

The word *halal* literally means “permissible” or “lawful.” It applies to food, drink, behavior, and almost every aspect of life. For meat, Islamic texts provide clear requirements, making it an obligation for Muslims to ensure that what they consume is *halal*.

By contrast, *zabihah* simply means “slaughtered.” Historically, in Muslim-majority societies, slaughter was naturally carried out according to Islamic rules, so the term *zabihah* became closely associated with *halal* meat. But the word itself does not inherently mean “*halal* slaughter.” It merely denotes that an animal has been killed by cutting the throat of the animal.

The North American Meaning

In the U.S. and Canada, *zabihah* has taken on a more specific and stricter definition. Within many communities, it refers to the meat of animals that are:

- Hand-slaughtered by a Muslim,
- Performed without stunning, and
- Accompanied by the recitation of God’s name (*tasmiyyah*).

This usage developed as a way for Muslims to safeguard their dietary integrity in environments where *halal* oversight was limited. It provided reassurance that the meat they consumed was unquestionably compliant. However, it also narrowed the meaning of *zabihah*, making it appear as the only true form of *halal*, while other valid interpretations were overlooked.



[Halal and Zabihah] are mainly used in the United States and Canada, where the two words are commonly used side by side to describe meat.

[Zabihah] refers to the meat of animals that are:

- Hand-slaughtered by a Muslim
- Performed without stunning, and
- Accompanied by the recitation of God’s name (tasmiyah).



Halal in a Globalized Food Industry

As food production became more industrialized, global halal certification standards emerged to reconcile religious principles with modern practices. These standards often highlight the diversity of Islamic interpretation:

- The **Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO)** accepts slaughter by Jews and Christians, a view accepted by some schools of thought.
- The **Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC)** requires slaughter to be performed exclusively by Muslims.
- On stunning and mechanical slaughter, some standards permit them under strict conditions, while others reject them.

These differences are not contradictions but rather reflections of the flexibility within Islamic jurisprudence, shaped by culture, context, and modern realities.



Standard	Countries or Organization	Slaughterer	Stunning	Mechanical slaughter*)	Vessels to cut
SMIIC 1:2019	OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) (57 countries)	Muslim	Allowed (Poultry not explicitly mentioned)	Allowed	Trachea, Esophagus, veins and arteries.
GSO 993:2015	GCC countries (6 countries)	Muslim, Jew or Christian	Allowed only for large animals, not poultry	Allowed	Pharynx **) esophagus, jugular veins
MS 1500	Malaysia	Muslim	Allowed	Not allowed	Trachea, Esophagus, veins and arteries.
SJPH and SNI 99002:2016 and SNI 99003:2018	Indonesia	Muslim	Allowed	Not allowed	Trachea, Esophagus, veins and arteries.
PS 3733-2019	Pakistan	Muslim	Not allowed	Not allowed	Trachea, Esophagus, veins and arteries.

*) applies mainly to poultry.

**)In the GSO 993:2015 standard, the Arabic text uses "القصبية الهوائية" (al-qasaba al-hawā'iya), meaning "trachea," though the English version translates it as "pharynx."

In all cases, the operator activating the machine must recite the *tasmiyyah* (invocation of God’s name). Stunning, where permitted, is strictly regulated to ensure the animal is rendered only unconscious—not dead—before slaughter.

The Source of Confusion

In North America, these global variations often lead to confusion. A product labeled *zabihah halal* may, for instance, come from a machine-slaughter process that does not align with the community’s traditional expectation of “zabihah.” One real example is found in Canada, where a halal-certified product is marketed as “Zabihah meat” but is produced through mechanical slaughter. This illustrates the ongoing tension between local community perceptions and the broader interpretations reflected in international halal standards—tensions that continue to fuel debates around halal meat.

In kosher production, only about 30% of the meat qualifies as kosher, while the remaining portion, known as *heif*, not accepted under kosher standards, is sometimes sold under halal labeling. However, kosher slaughter does not meet all halal requirements, and unless the meat has proper halal certification, labeling it as halal may be misleading.



For many Muslims, insisting on zabihah reflects a strong spiritual conviction—a desire for the highest level of assurance.

Faith, Choice, and Respect

For many Muslims, insisting on zabihah reflects a strong spiritual conviction—a desire for the highest level of assurance. For others, certified halal meat, even if produced with stunning or mechanical slaughter, is fully acceptable. Both perspectives represent sincere efforts to live according to faith.

What matters most is knowledge. By understanding how different halal standards work, Muslims can make informed choices that align with their beliefs. Equally important is the willingness to respect differences within the community. Diversity in practice should not divide, but rather enrich, Muslim life in a globalized world.

Conclusion

The question is not whether halal is “enough” to be halal. Instead, it is about recognizing the breadth of valid interpretations and navigating them with clarity and compassion. Whether one follows a stricter view of zabihah or relies on internationally recognized halal standards, both paths are rooted in the same goal: to honor faith through what we consume.

In the end, halal is not just a label—it is a commitment. And understanding its diversity is key to strengthening, not fragmenting, the global Muslim community.

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SWEETNESS OVERLOAD: TAMING SUGAR CRAVINGS



By Summaya Ali, MS, RD

THINK ABOUT THE LAST TIME YOU HAD A SWEET little craving. It's a pretty amazing interplay between body systems. It results in a desire for a specific food that feels rewarding to the brain. This can arise from sensory cues, emotional triggers, or underlying health conditions. Unlike hunger, cravings are harder to satisfy. The sugar spike feels good at the moment as the "happy hormone" dopamine is released and the brain's reward centers get activated. But it is pretty short lived. Sugar levels drop and fatigue, headaches, and an anxious mood take over. The body triggers another craving looking for more sugar. Overeating is often the result, and other body systems can get disturbed and cause symptoms like bloating and acid reflux.

What's causing the cravings?

Cause	Explanation
Overly restrictive diets	The brain will focus on the exact items that were eliminated and cause episodes of overeating later. Try to be flexible and include a variety of foods, but save the ones you are concerned about for last as a treat.
Poor sleep	Just one night of poor sleep is enough to disrupt appetite-regulating hormones ghrelin and leptin, causing frequent hunger pangs that don't seem to be satisfied even after eating. Leads to unhealthy food choices which negatively affect sleep the next night.
Metabolic dysfunction	With insulin resistance, the body cannot move sugar into the blood for energy, so it signals for more food through hunger pangs or cravings. An overactive thyroid produces too much thyroid hormone causing calories to be burned remarkably faster than normal.
Nutrient deficiencies	Diets low in protein, magnesium, and B-vitamins can create problems with sleep, mood, and maintaining good energy levels.
Environmental cues and stress	These train your body to crave sugar at certain times regardless of hunger or meal time.

The sugar industry

The global dynamics of sugar are steered by a multitude of factors, including population growth, economics, and demands from the food industry. Domestic sugar consumption continues to increase, with the United States being one of the top markets, as reported by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service report in May 2025. The average daily sugar intake in the U.S. is upwards of 20 teaspoons, which far exceeds recommended intakes. Sugar is an inexpensive additive that serves many functions; however, its convenience and usage is not heading in the best interest of our health. Consumers are getting accustomed to high sugar foods, and without it, things seem to be unpalatable, and daily routines are incomplete.

Educating families

The little ones can have sugar cravings too. The concern is when sugar constitutes a major portion of children's food intake on a daily basis. Their taste buds get used to that sweetness and they want it consistently. Snacks or drinks marketed toward children have statements like "made with real fruit" or a "good source of vitamin C." This might cause families to believe it is a healthy food when in reality, the major constituent is sugar. Although public health efforts to reshape product labeling and reduce unhealthy marketing are in effect, sugar intake in children is still far beyond acceptable levels. Educating families is a great first step and helps to empower children to make better decisions on their own and become confident eaters.



The average daily sugar intake in the U.S. is upwards of 20 teaspoons, which far exceeds recommended intakes.

Building healthier habits

Good lifestyle habits can help tame those cravings and improve overall well-being. It starts with paying attention to hunger and fullness cues. Fuel your body at regular intervals. If that's hard at first, try giving a three to four hour gap between meals. This makes it easier to manage your appetite for the rest of the day. You won't have monstrous hunger by dinnertime. Also, notice how you feel after a meal. If there's emptiness even though you have eaten enough, it may be a sign that you need to add more protein to meals. It fills you quickly and keeps you satisfied longer. Our bodies constantly make and use protein



so it's necessary to eat it throughout the day. Meat, fish, eggs, milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, beans, and tofu are good protein choices. Add one or more of these to each meal.

Set up a good environment

If you keep large packages of treats in your fridge, your brain will keep reminding you to eat them until they are finished. Get small packages. There is always a greater blessing in the little things. Also, know your triggers and make something get in the way. Schedule an activity that keeps your hands busy and requires concentration. Lastly, try to satisfy the craving by pairing sweetness with a healthy snack (Champion 2022). Some quick go-to's are graham crackers and a banana, or almonds with chocolate chips.

Improving gut health

It all depends on who's home. Our diets, health conditions, environment, and life stage all impact what bacteria are thriving inside. Diets high in sugar make the bad bacteria set up shop in our gut. They communicate with the brain and can influence our appetite, cognition, and behavior. They feast on sugar and encourage us to eat more sugar so they can grow and multiply. Fortunately, healthy foods can combat this pretty easily. The more types of plants you eat, the more powerful your good bacteria will become. Eat meat some days, go vegetarian other days. See what fruits are on sale and stock up on a couple of different colors. Eat foods rich in magnesium and B-vitamins like whole grain breads, oats, nuts, green

leafy produce, and my favorite, dark chocolate. These keep up mood, energy, and promote good sleep by regulating neurotransmitters in the brain (Leopold 2022). Eat probiotic yogurt to increase the good bacteria. Buy plain or low-sugar varieties.

Diabetes-friendly sweetness

In Type 2 diabetes, insulin can get overwhelmed and has trouble moving sugar from our food to the rest of the body. If you are having a sugary treat on occasion, try to do it in the morning. Body systems are more efficient compared to late evening. Avoid low-calorie or alternative sweeteners. Randomized controlled trials and observational studies have examined these sweeteners and found mixed results in relation to blood sugar control and body weight (Sylvetsky 2018). These have a lot of unknowns and can possibly lead to other metabolic consequences. A little table sugar or honey can safely do the job.

Fruit is a refreshing treat on its own and can be used in place of sugar to add sweetness and flavor. Fruit is filled with water and fiber, which helps keep you satisfied longer. Along with being mindful of portion size, a great strategy is to pair fruit with protein foods. This helps to slow down the absorption and prevent sugar spikes.

Sweet ideas

While it may seem like sugary foods or drinks can provide the much needed energy boost, they actually leave us feeling more sluggish soon after.

Try the healthy ideas below for lasting energy and a delicious treat:

- Banana drizzled with melted dark chocolate
- Apple slices with peanut butter
- Strawberries dipped in yogurt and crunchy cereal
- Dates stuffed with nuts and chocolate chips
- Fruit with cottage cheese

Closing thoughts

There is someone I admire dearly, and the beauty of his example is its simplicity. It is our Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).



Good lifestyle habits can help tame those cravings and improve overall well-being.

While it may seem like sugary foods or drinks can provide the much needed energy boost, they actually leave us feeling more sluggish soon after.



He had an excellent balance in all aspects of life. He liked to keep voluntary fasts, but he would also take a break on some days. He would stay up at night for worship, then he would also sleep some nights. Likewise, he would eat certain foods more regularly and other ones only occasionally. Following his wisdom puts us in a better state to perform our worship and daily obligations. It also promotes gratitude and softens the heart.

Remember that sugar does not have to be completely eliminated in order to be healthy. It is okay to satisfy a craving sometimes. It is usually harmless unless it becomes a habitual occurrence and is accompanied by other concerns. Prioritize healthy habits, but keep it easy on the mind. You will have more energy and good satisfaction, and when the occasion arises, you can handle yourself around sugar in a healthier way.

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Company of the Year: Kerry



Kerry Sets the Standard in Halal Food Innovation

When it comes to food and beverage, trust is everything. For Muslim consumers and manufacturers worldwide, that trust is built on the assurance of halal integrity — from sourcing to production, right through to the final product. Few companies have embraced this responsibility as fully as Kerry, a pioneer in taste and nutrition solutions. It is for this reason that they are the well-deserved recipient of IFANCA's Company of the Year Award for 2025.

A Global Footprint with Local Care

Every day, millions of people enjoy foods and beverages made possible by Kerry's innovations. With more than 22,000 employees, 150+ innovation and manufacturing centers, and a presence in over 30 countries, Kerry partners with some of the world's best-known food, beverage, and pharmaceutical brands. Its purpose — "Inspiring Food, Nourishing Life" — drives not only innovation, but also a deep responsibility to meet the cultural and spiritual needs of consumers across the globe.

Kerry's halal efforts are wide and expansive: the company employs 1,100 RD&A scientists, oversees 44 active plants, and offers more than 4,000 halal-certified products worldwide. This scale demonstrates a strong commitment to providing halal integrity while meeting global consumer demands and market standards.

Leadership in the Halal Ingredient Market

Kerry's leadership in the halal ingredient market stems from more than compliance. The company has built systems that embed halal integrity at every stage of the global supply chain. From ingredient sourcing to formulation, Kerry ensures products meet stringent halal requirements while also advancing innovation, taste, and nutrition.

At IFANCA's 22nd International Halal Food Conference, Kerry took center stage at the Banquet and Awards Night by winning the prestigious Company of the Year Award. The honor recognized Kerry's long-standing trust, loyalty, and dedication to adhering to strict halal standards worldwide. Representing Kerry, Angela Thibedeau, Regulatory Senior Scientist, attended the conference for the first time and reflected on the deeper purpose behind Kerry's work: "We have worked really hard to meet the needs of our customers, and part of that is to meet their spiritual needs."

Comprehensive Product Portfolio

Kerry's halal-certified offerings span a wide array of categories, each designed to meet specific functional and nutritional needs. These include food ingredients for texture and shelf-life, flavors for taste and aroma, and beverages like coffee and tea. Dairy products and cheese support protein enrichment and fermentation control,



while spices, sauces, and dressings enhance flavor and stability. Batters, breadings, and fruit drink mixes contribute to texture and taste, and probiotics aid gut health. The portfolio also features vegetable-based ingredients, food chemicals for processing, dairy powders, and essential oils for flavor and preservation — all developed to uphold halal standards across global markets.

Driving Global Trade Connections

As global food systems expand, Kerry plays a vital role in bridging halal supply chains. The company's expertise allows brands to enter new markets with confidence, ensuring that halal-certified offerings meet consumer expectations and regulatory standards alike. This is especially significant in today's interconnected world, where trade in halal products is both a cultural bridge and an economic driver.

Setting the Standard for the Future

Being named Company of the Year by IFANCA is not just a milestone for Kerry — it highlights a path forward for the industry. Kerry has shown that halal values can be built directly into innovation, quality, and sustainability initiatives. For companies seeking to serve Muslim consumers, Kerry's example demonstrates how halal integrity can strengthen trust, open new markets, and shape the future of global food trade.

Once again, Congratulations to Kerry on being named Company of the Year 2025. 🍷



Keta Salmon with Za'atar and Sumac

By Zainab Razavi/ [Instagram](#) [BismillahBros](#)

Servings: 6 | Time: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 6 Wild Alaskan Keta salmon fillets
- ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- 2 teaspoons za'atar
- ½ teaspoon sumac
(optional; taste your za'atar first and adjust)
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder or
1 minced garlic clove
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- Pink Himalayan sea salt, to taste
- ½ lemon, juiced
- 5–6 whole garlic cloves

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven or grill. If baking, preheat the oven to 400°F. Lightly grease a baking tray with a bit of olive oil.
2. Arrange the Keta salmon fillets on the tray, skin-side down. In a small bowl, mix together the za'atar, sumac, garlic powder, smoked paprika, and sea salt.
3. Sprinkle the spice mix evenly over the salmon. Drizzle with half of the olive oil and brush to coat each fillet thoroughly.
4. Squeeze fresh lemon juice over the top and scatter the whole garlic cloves around the fillets.
5. Bake or grill for 15–20 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fillets, until the salmon flakes easily with a fork and the surface turns lightly golden.
6. Remove from heat and add a final squeeze of lemon just before serving. Garnish with fresh kale or herbs, lemon wedges, and a sprinkle of pomegranate seeds for a pop of color and tang.
7. Serve over a bed of sautéed kale or mixed greens with warm pita or crusty bread and add a side of cucumber-yogurt dip or tzatziki for a refreshing contrast.

Notes:

If your za'atar already contains sumac, reduce or skip the extra sumac to keep the flavors balanced. Brush both the salmon and the grill grates with olive oil before cooking to prevent sticking. Keta salmon is lean and can overcook quickly; remove it from the heat as soon as it flakes easily. ©



Tandoori Chicken Taquitos

By Zainab Razavi/  [BismillahBros](https://www.instagram.com/BismillahBros)

Servings: 6 | Time: 45 minutes (plus marinating)

INGREDIENTS

Taquitos:

Shredded tandoori chicken (recipe below)

6-inch tortillas (low-carb, corn or white)

¼ cup oil

Toppings (optional):

pico de gallo

salsa verde

regular salsa

sour cream

fresh coriander

Tandoori Chicken:

2 lbs zabiha halal boneless chicken

1 teaspoon garlic salt

1 teaspoon ginger-garlic paste

½ teaspoon smoked paprika

½ teaspoon cumin powder


½ teaspoon Kashmiri red chili powder

4–5 teaspoons tandoori masala

DIRECTIONS

1. Marinate the tandoori chicken. In a bowl, combine all spices and seasonings. Coat the chicken well. Marinate for a few hours or overnight for maximum flavor.
2. Stir-fry in oil until fully cooked, then shred.
3. To assemble the taquitos, lay a tortilla flat and place some tandoori chicken along one edge.
4. Roll tightly and secure with a toothpick if needed.
5. Fry until golden and crispy. You can also air fry or bake for a lighter version.
6. Serve warm with your choice of toppings, such as a drizzle of salsa verde and sprinkle of fresh coriander!

Note:

These taquitos freeze beautifully, making them ideal for school lunches. 

**WANT TO SHARE YOUR
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Thai Chili Mango Salad with Chicken

By Zainab Razavi/  [BismillahBros](#)

Servings: 4-6 | Time: 35-40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

Chicken:

- 2 lbs zabiha halal chicken tenders
- ½ cup Thai sweet chili sauce
- ½ cup Sriracha mayo (adjust for spice)
- ¼ cup oil
- garlic salt, to taste

Salad:

- 3 cups shredded green cabbage
- 1 cup shredded purple cabbage
- 2 cups chopped romaine or mixed greens
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1-2 ripe mangoes, thinly sliced
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves (optional)
- Toppings:
- ¼ cup roasted sunflower seeds
- ⅓ cup crispy quinoa or roasted peanuts
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds


Thai Sweet Chili Vinaigrette:

- ¼ cup Thai sweet chili sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 garlic clove, finely grated
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red chili

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine Thai sweet chili sauce, Sriracha mayo, oil, and garlic salt. Add the chicken tenders, coating them evenly.
3. Arrange the chicken on a lined baking sheet and bake for 20 minutes, or until the juices run clear. Avoid overbaking to keep the chicken tender. Let it rest for 5 minutes, then slice thinly.
4. In a large serving bowl or platter, combine the shredded cabbages, greens, and carrots. Layer with mango slices and cilantro.
5. Prepare the vinaigrette by whisking together Thai chili sauce, rice vinegar, lime juice, sesame oil, honey, garlic, and crushed red chili until smooth. Adjust the seasoning to your taste.
6. Drizzle with Thai sweet chili vinaigrette just before serving.

Notes:

For a smoky twist, grill the chicken instead of baking. Fresh mango adds the perfect touch of sweetness. Use extra slices if you love the contrast of sweet and spicy. 



Ras Malai Milk Cake

By Khadija Rizvi

Servings: 12-18 mini loaves | Time: 2 hours 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

Milk Syrup:

- 1¼ cups evaporated milk
- ¾ cup condensed milk
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 1 bay leaf
- 2-3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 cardamom pods

Pound Cake:

- 1½ cups cake flour
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 sticks of butter, room temperature
- 4 large eggs, plus 3 egg yolks, room temperature
- ¼ cup whole milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Whipped Cream:

- 1¾ cups heavy cream
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and line a loaf pan with parchment paper.
2. Combine the cake flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a bowl and mix for 2–3 minutes using an electric mixer.
3. On medium speed, add the room temperature butter and mix until the butter has broken up into pieces throughout the flour.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, vanilla, and milk.
5. Add the wet ingredients into the flour-butter mixture and continue mixing on high speed until fully incorporated.
6. Transfer the batter into the prepared loaf pan and bake for 65–75 minutes. Allow to cool completely.
7. While the cake is baking or cooling, combine the evaporated milk, condensed milk, whole milk, bay leaf, cinnamon sticks, and cardamom in a saucepan. Simmer on medium-low for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and strain out the spices. Let the milk syrup cool slightly.
8. Cut thick slices of pound cake and arrange snugly in individual mini trays or small dessert cups. Trim pieces to fit if needed.
9. Spoon the warm milk syrup over each portion, about 2–4 tablespoons per tray, so the cake is fully soaked but not floating.
10. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or overnight for a softer texture.
11. Whip heavy cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla until firm peaks form.
12. Pipe or spread a layer of whipped cream over each mini cake.
13. Garnish with crushed pistachios, dried rose petals, or saffron.
14. Keep chilled until serving. ©



The Impact of Halal Certification on U.S. Exports



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED States and the Muslim world is older than the nation itself. Long before the Declaration of Independence was signed, merchants from the American colonies were crossing the Atlantic toward the ports of North Africa and the Mediterranean. They carried salted fish, flour, lumber, and other modest goods, items that seem simple today, yet formed the earliest threads of a global trade identity. More than the food itself, what made these early exchanges remarkable was the trust and curiosity that grew around them. Food thus became the first shared language between two very different worlds. In a way, it also opened doors to a chain of thought where American traders came to accept the needs and requirements of people of other faiths. This seemingly small reality would later play an unexpectedly large role in shaping US trade relations.

As these early exchanges continued, a pattern emerged. Raisins, olives, olive oil, saffron, and grains travelled westward across the sea, while lumber, flour, and dried fish moved eastward. Over time, these early maritime relationships laid the groundwork for something more enduring. The young American republic, not yet fully formed politically, was already learning about diplomacy, risk, resilience, and the cultural significance of what people eat. These early maritime relationships laid the groundwork for an unexpected foundation, one that would, centuries later, shape the contours of the global halal food economy.

Morocco: America's First Muslim Ally

A defining moment arrived in 1777 when Sultan Mohammed III of Morocco became the first foreign ruler to recognize the United States as an independent nation. This act of early diplomacy opened Moroccan ports to American vessels and set the stage for the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1786, which remains the oldest unbroken treaty in US history.

Unlike many diplomatic ties in the 18th century, this relationship was rooted in mutual benefit rather than conquest or colonization. Morocco exported olive oil, dates, figs, and spices; the US supplied lumber, grain, and increasingly, processed foods. These exchanges proved that agricultural trade could serve as a foundation for trust. The young United States, in its search for legitimacy beyond Europe, found in Morocco both an ally and a gateway to the broader Muslim world.

Lessons from the Barbary Coast

Not all early interactions were smooth. While Morocco extended friendship, American ships traveling near Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli faced corsair raids. These threats eventually sparked the Barbary Wars (1801-1815), America's first overseas military conflicts.



Although costly, these encounters taught the United States vital lessons about maritime security, negotiation, and international commerce. More importantly, they forced the new nation to engage with Muslim-majority states not as distant curiosities but as global players with their own diplomatic, political, and economic power. The hard-won ability to secure Mediterranean trade routes would later help the US expand commerce into the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, all regions central to today's halal markets.

Industrialization and the Rise of the American Dairy Trade

By the 20th century, industrialization had reshaped American agriculture. Food production became more efficient, scientific, and large in scale. Among the industries transformed during this period, dairy became one of the most globally significant. Yet a fundamental obstacle limited its reach in Muslim-majority regions: rennet.

Traditionally, rennet, which was used to coagulate milk during cheesemaking, was derived from the stomach linings of calves, goats, and lambs, and in some cases, pigs. This made large portions of US cheese and many of its byproducts religiously impermissible for Muslims.

Consequently, an entire sector of American exports remained largely untapped.

Meanwhile, whey, the liquid leftover from cheese production, was regarded as a low-value byproduct and often discarded. Its nutritional potential had not yet been recognized. These two constraints, non-halal rennet and undervalued whey, created a ceiling on US dairy exports to Muslim markets. That ceiling would be shattered in the 1980s.

IFANCA and the Halal Dairy Revolution

A transformative moment came in the mid-1980s when Pfizer and Chr. Hansen developed Chy-max, the world's first genetically engineered microbial (GMO) rennet. But innovation alone was not enough. To unlock halal markets, the product needed to meet the faith-based dietary requirements of millions of consumers.

This is where the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) played a defining role. IFANCA worked closely with Pfizer and Chr. Hansen to ensure that microbial rennet met halal standards from production to processing. The result was groundbreaking: for the first time in history, American cheese and dairy derivatives could be halal-certified.

The implications were enormous. Whey, once considered waste, can now be certified halal and used in infant formula, protein shakes, supplements, and nutritional products. With the global Muslim population growing rapidly and demand for fortified foods rising across the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, US dairy producers suddenly had access to an expansive new market.

What had begun as a niche scientific innovation quickly became a global export advantage. This moment demonstrated how biotechnology, when aligned with ethical and religious considerations, could reshape entire industries.



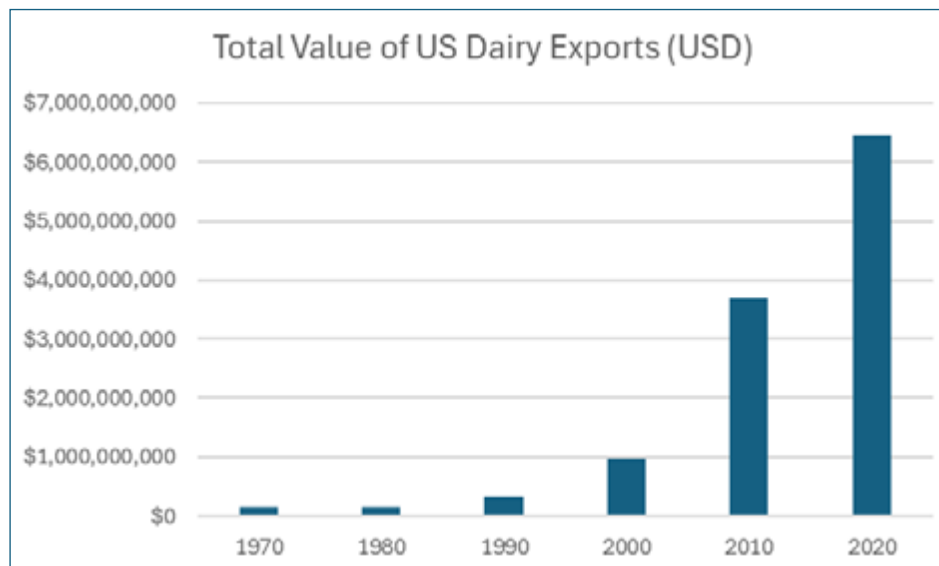
...respecting religious dietary needs can generate new commercial pathways, highlighting how ethics and innovation can work hand in hand to create global opportunities.

Global Demand and Expanding Market Access

The timing of this halal breakthrough could not have been more strategic. In the 1980s and 1990s, global cheese consumption surged, primarily driven by the expansion of fast-food chains and Western-style convenience dining. Every new pizza outlet, burger chain, and bakery requires vast quantities of cheese and dairy ingredients.

With microbial rennet now halal-certified, American producers could supply markets that had previously been off-limits. At the same time, scientists began to fully understand the nutritional value of whey. This was especially significant in regions where consistent access to fortified nutrition was limited. Whey-based baby formula, for example, became an essential product in many Muslim-majority countries.

By the early 2000s, US dairy ingredients, including cheese, milk powders, whey protein, lactose, and isolates, were being incorporated into food manufacturing facilities across Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The upward trend in US dairy exports over the



past five decades reflects the direct impact of these scientific and regulatory advancements.

The transformation was not simply economic. It proved that respecting religious dietary needs can generate new commercial pathways, highlighting how ethics and innovation can work hand in hand to create global opportunities.

From Sultan Mohammed III to Modern Markets

Centuries after the first American ships arrived in Moroccan ports, Morocco remains one of the United States' most reliable agricultural partners. Following the US-Morocco Free Trade Agreement in 2006, bilateral agricultural trade increased by more than 100%.

In 2023 alone, Morocco imported over \$600 million in US agricultural products, including wheat, corn, and processed foods. What began as simple two-way exchanges. Salted fish for olive oil, flour for spices, has evolved into a movement centered on high-value dairy proteins, halal-certified cheese, and specialized nutritional ingredients.

This continuity underscores a deeper truth: relationships built on trust, food, and mutual respect tend to endure. The early diplomatic hospitality extended by Sultan Mohammed III laid a foundation for a modern trade partnership that still thrives today.

Legacy and the Road Ahead

The story of halal certification in the United States is ultimately a story of adaptation, of how a nation's food industry learned to listen, adjust, and innovate in response to cultural and faith-based needs. From the wooden decks of pre-revolutionary merchant ships to the stainless-steel bioreactors producing microbial enzymes today, American engagement with Muslim consumers has evolved through curiosity, respect, and scientific ingenuity.

IFANCA's role in certifying microbial rennet bridged the gap between biotechnology and faith. This allowed US dairy producers to participate meaningfully in Muslim-majority markets, markets that continue to grow in size, sophistication, and purchasing power.

Today, whether it is a slice of pizza served in Marrakesh or a protein drink enjoyed in Jakarta, the influence of this long history is visible. These foods carry within them centuries of maritime exploration, diplomatic collaboration, scientific breakthroughs, and a shared appreciation for nourishment. [®]



Business with Integrity: How Islamic Ethics Shape the Halal Economy

By Kelly Izdiyar Crosby

MANY OF US HAVE HUGE CONCERNS ABOUT business, trade, industrialization, and their impacts on the world. And Muslims are no exception. We see the effects of unfettered capitalism and its deleterious effects on our societal well-being and the environment. Whether it's the growing concerns of climate change, toxic waste from industrial pollution, or the impact of corporations on local businesses, there is a cultural and financial shift taking place globally.

The average consumer is not only looking for the cheapest product or service. And business success is no longer

solely determined by how much money it makes. Consumers are asking corporations, "What does your company do to address the issue of workers' rights? How are you reducing environmental waste? Are your materials sourced ethically? How diverse is your workforce?" The new parameters considered have led to the promotion of a new business model called the corporate social responsibility model, or CSR. Of course, the idea of ethical business practices has been around forever. This particular model gained popularity in the early 2000s, partly in response to the dot-com crash and the financial crisis of 2008. According to Investopedia, the CSR model

“encourages companies to operate in ways that enhance society and the environment while still being accountable to their stakeholders and the public.” CSR initiatives typically fall under the following four categories: environmental, ethical, philanthropic, and financial.

Types of CSR Initiatives

Environmental Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling materials • Reducing emissions in manufacturing • Replenishing natural resources like trees, ponds, and nature grounds
Ethical Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair treatment of all customers regardless of age, race, culture, etc. • Favorable wages and benefits • Partnerships with diverse vendors • Transparency for investors
Philanthropic Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations to charities • Sponsors fundraising events
Financial Responsibility	Financial investments in programs that encourage environmental initiatives, sustainability, and a diverse workforce

...the CSR model “encourages companies to operate in ways that enhance society and the environment while still being accountable to their stakeholders and the public.



All of these values and ideals are part and parcel of our faith. We have much to offer the world as an antidote to the social and financial ills of our time. For Muslims, conducting business is not merely a transaction but an act of worship; an act we are encouraged to do with fairness, honesty, and excellence. [The Prophet \(ﷺ\) said](#), “The truthful, trustworthy merchant is with the Prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs.” Our Prophet (ﷺ) along with many of his family members and companions were merchants. We understand the important role profitable trade plays in our lives.



For Muslims, conducting business is not merely a transaction but an act of worship; an act we are encouraged to do with fairness, honesty, and excellence.



We are prohibited from using interest and selling products deemed detrimental to society, such as alcohol. We are also forbidden from creating artificial scarcity or misrepresenting any product defects. Islam advocates for worker's rights as [our Prophet \(ﷺ\)](#) said, "Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries." Historically and in our modern times, philanthropic endowments were used to invest into Muslims communities to support mosques, libraries, public baths, schools, and hospitals. A *hima* or "protected place" was created to conserve nature and protect animal life. Our standards for halal food production aim for the humane treatment of animals and the cleaner, more ethical means of farming.

Thriving trade industries can be good for the global economy, which can lead to better jobs, higher wages, and potentially, a better quality of life. We have seen a huge increase in the "halal business economy" as people, Muslims and non-Muslim, are looking for cleaner, healthier, ethically made products and services created with Islamic principles in mind. And it is wonderful that the "Islamic business model" dovetails perfectly with the modern Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) model.

Despite supply chain disruptions, inflation, and violent conflicts, the future looks bright. According to the [Dinar Standard 2024-2025 report](#):

"Amid unprecedented geopolitical and economic volatility, driven by factors such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, shifting trade alignments, and pronounced regionalization of economic activities, Muslim spending across the Islamic economy sectors (excluding Islamic finance) still expanded by 5.5% in 2023. Looking forward, this spending is projected to rise to US\$3.36 trillion by 2028, indicating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.3% over five years. Despite inflationary pressures and supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical tensions, consumer resilience remains high."

While the halal economy is booming, we also face challenges in trying to maintain halal guidance in our everyday lives. The largest Islamic economies are based in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. In the West, we have made many strides in creating halal commerce in the US and Canada, but there is still room for growth.

Islamic ethics are compatible with fair trade business ethics. Fair trade is trade between companies and producers in developing countries in which fair prices are paid to the producers. The producers receive fair wages, work in safe conditions, and can invest in their communities. Many everyday items are available as fair-trade commodities, including sugar, fruit, chocolate, coffee, and cocoa. The next time you buy your next cup of coffee or chocolate bar, look for the "Fair Trade" label. Fair trade items are more expensive, as you are paying the premium price to ensure workers' and environmental rights. For those on a fixed budget, try to switch out one non-fair





[O]ur Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries.”



trade item out for a fair trade one at a time so you don't feel overwhelmed.

Navigating the finance world can be overwhelming, especially if you are not financially savvy. How do you know if your 401(k) is halal? Which stocks are permissible to purchase? How can you avoid *riba* in an interest-based economy, or buy a home in a Sharia-compliant way? Islamic scholars provide guidance, and Sharia-compliant financing offers alternatives to conventional loans. While monthly payments may differ, Sharia-compliant loans can have a variable lifetime cost compared with conventional loans, allowing you to align your finances with both your faith and long-term planning.

Try to invest as much as you can into the halal economy on a local level. You do this every time you shop at your locally owned Muslim business. Whether it's a brick-and-mortar business like a coffee shop or an online business

selling modest clothing, every dollar you contribute helps to promote the halal business trade in the United States.

Supporting the halal economy goes beyond everyday purchases; it's about contributing to ethical, faith-aligned commerce. IFANCA plays a vital role in this ecosystem, upholding integrity in halal certification through rigorous audits and inspections to ensure food products worldwide meet halal laws and guidelines. By promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical practices, IFANCA exemplifies how Islamic ethics can shape a thriving, principled halal economy.

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Gut Health in Motion

By Ali Othman, NSCA-CPT®

DIGESTION IS OFTEN THOUGHT OF AS AN autonomous internal process where food enters the body, nutrients are absorbed, and waste is eliminated. Although the process is internal, it is affected by factors far more interesting than what, and when you eat. Physical activity can reshape the body, relieve stress, and improve cardiovascular health. The right activity at the right time can alleviate digestive discomfort, improve digestive processes, and reduce the risk of colon cancer.

Digestion relies on peristalsis, the involuntary wave-like muscle contractions in the stomach and intestines that propel food and waste through the digestive tract. Physical activity can stimulate these contractions, leading to more efficient digestion. Increased activity boosts blood circulation and improves the movement of oxygen and nutrients to your muscles and organs, including those responsible for digestion.

Increasing your physical activity can have an immediate and positive effect on digestion. A [2021 study by M.K. Hosseini-Asl et al published by the National Library of Medicine](#) found that, “minimal exercise after meals was associated with significant improvements in the GI tract symptoms such as belching, flatus, postprandial epigastric fullness/bloating, gas incontinency and abdominal discomfort/pain.” In this four-week study, participants walked for ten-to-fifteen minutes immediately after each meal. This simple, low-intensity activity requires no equipment or practice, yet proved to be as effective as medication in alleviating digestive discomfort.

When you're physically active, your heart rate increases and your breathing accelerates. This triggers a lot of internal bodily functions. The vagus nerve, which extends from your brain to organs throughout your body, plays an important role in regulating and stimulating many of these functions. One of its many important functions is connecting the brain and gut, this enables the body to produce digestive enzymes, secrete stomach acids, and stimulate contractions within the digestive tract.



Physical activity stimulates peristalsis, the wave-like contractions that move food through your digestive tract, making digestion faster and smoother.

“minimal exercise after meals was associated with significant improvements in the GI tract symptoms such as belching, flatus, postprandial epigastric fullness/bloating, gas incontinency and abdominal discomfort/pain.”



Beyond these immediate benefits, long-term, regular physical activity provides additional benefits. Increased digestive enzyme activity supports the overall efficiency of the digestive system, helps the gut operate at its best, and mitigate the risk or manage the symptoms of many of today's chronic illnesses.

When engaging in physical activity directly after eating, it is important to maintain a relatively low intensity. High-intensity movements or exercises that involve jumping, kneeling, or lying flat can lead to acid reflux or heartburn. After eating, a large quantity of blood is diverted to the stomach to aid in digestion so high-intensity exercise too soon after eating may lead to muscle cramps.

The key is to match the type, timing, and intensity to your personal needs, although a [2020 study by M. Aqeel et al published by *Nutrients* in MDPI](#) found, “a beneficial effect of post-meal exercise on improved postprandial glycemic response regardless of time of day.” That means whether breakfast, lunch, or dinner, there are many low-intensity, gut-boosting activities that provide these digestive benefits.

Walking

Walking is simple, effective, and inclusive, and can improve overall physical and mental health. It is the unsung hero of the gut. To support digestion, walk for twenty-to-thirty minutes at a comfortable pace within thirty minutes of eating. Walking is one of the only physical activities you should engage in so soon after eating. Maintain a low-to-moderate intensity and an upright posture so gravity can assist the movement of food through your gastrointestinal system.

Yoga

Certain Yoga poses can provide digestive benefits by stimulating blood flow, massaging the abdomen, and acti-

vating the parasympathetic “rest-and-digest” response which helps slow down your heart rate and relax sphincter muscles within the digestive tracts.

- **Child's Pose (Balasana):** Helps calm the nervous system and reduce stress-related digestive discomfort. Kneel on the floor, sit back on your heels, and fold forward at your hips so your forehead rests on the ground. Stretch your arms forward and relax your hips, back, and shoulders. Hold for thirty-seconds-to-three-minutes, breathing deeply and allowing your body to gently stretch.
- **Wind-Relieving Pose (Pawanmuktasana):** Applies gentle pressure to the abdomen, helping release trapped gas and relieve bloating. Lie on your back, pull both knees towards your chest, and wrap your arms around your them. Gently squeeze them into your abdomen, relax your shoulders, and breathe deeply while holding the pose for one-to-two minutes.
- **Seated Spinal Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana):** Compresses and stretches the abdominals, improving circulation and mobility. Sit with your legs extended, bend one knee and place your foot outside the opposite thigh. Rest your opposite elbow outside your bent knee and place your other hand behind you for support. Sit tall, shoulders back, and gently twist your torso towards your bent knee. Hold for twenty-to-sixty seconds on each side while breathing steadily.
- **Cat-Cow Pose (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana):** Supports spinal flexibility and increases blood flow to the digestive tract. Start on your hands and knees. Inhale deeply, arch your back and lift your head and tailbone (cow pose). Exhale steadily, round your spine and tuck your chin to your chest (cat pose). Inhale for cat, exhale for cow, move smoothly between the two postures for thirty-seconds-to-two-minutes.

Low-Impact Cardiovascular Exercise

Nearly all low-impact cardiovascular activities aid digestion by increasing circulation and promoting gentle, rhythmic movement within the digestive tract. In addition to walking, swimming, cycling, elliptical training, and many other activities produce repetitive, rhythmic lower body movement that stimulates peristalsis and supports digestive function.

Core and Pelvic Floor Strengthening

Strengthening your core and pelvic floor muscles can support digestive and pelvic organ function. Exercises such as planks, bridges, bird dogs, crunches, flutter kicks,

Balāsana



Pawanmuktāsana



Ardha Matsyendrasana



Marjaryāsana-Bitilāsana



The right type of exercise at the right time can stimulate peristalsis, improve blood circulation to digestive and pelvic organs, enhance nutrient absorption, and alleviate digestive discomfort.



and high knees build muscle that surrounds and supports pelvic organs. Strengthening the pelvic floor is associated with improved bladder control and reduced urgency or incontinence.

To maximize the benefits of these activities, maintain a low-to-moderate intensity and choose timing that fits your lifestyle; ideally around thirty-to-sixty minutes after meals. Pair your activity with a diet high in fiber, prebiotics, and probiotics, and stay well-hydrated throughout the day.

Your digestive system is dynamic and responsive, and physical activity can be one of its most trusted allies. The right type of exercise at the right time can stimulate peristalsis, improve blood circulation to digestive and pelvic organs, enhance nutrient absorption, and alleviate digestive discomfort. Before beginning your gut-focused exercise plan, consult your physician and start safely and confidently, setting the stage for long-term digestive health.

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Elecare® Ensure® Glucerna® Pediasure® Pedialyte® Similac® ZonePerfect®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant / Baby Food Products • Nutritional Supplements 	Abbott	Supermarkets and drugstores throughout the United States and Canada
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Godiva	Candy / Chocolate	Godiva Chocolatier	Company stores, department stores, supermarkets, gift shops, and drugstores throughout the United States
Golden Bonbon™	Candy / Chocolate	Asti Holdings Ltd.	Visit their website: www.goldenbonbon.com
Impossible™	Food Products	Impossible Foods Inc.	Grocery stores and select restaurants throughout the United States
J&M®	Food Products	J & M Food Products Company	Visit their website: www.halalcertified.com

Brand	Product Type	Company Name	Available At
Kontos®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bakery Items Bread 	Kontos Foods, Inc.	Ethnic (Arab, Indo/Pak) stores and fruit & vegetable markets throughout the United States
La Yogurt®	Dairy Products	Johanna Foods, Inc.	Supermarkets, fruit/vegetable markets, discount stores
Love & Quiches Gourmet®	Brownies and Cakes	Bello LLC, dba Love and Quiches	Visit their website for outlets: www.loveandquiches.com
MAYA™	Cosmetics	Maya Cosmetics	Visit their website: www.maya-cosmetics.com
Melaleuca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutritional Supplements Personal Care Products 	Melaleuca, Inc.	Visit their website for distributors: www.melaleuca.com
Mountain High™	Dairy Products	General Mills	Supermarkets throughout the United States
My Own Meal®	Food Products	My Own Meals, Inc.	Visit their website: www.myownmeals.com
National®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dessert Mixes Food Products Sauces & Dressings, Condiments Spices & Seasonings 	National Foods Limited	Ethnic (Indo/Pak) stores throughout the United States and Canada
Natural Delights®	Food Products	Datepac, LLC	Kroger, Meijer, Publix, Walmart, Whole Foods, and various markets throughout the United States
Nutrilite™	Nutritional Supplements	Access Business Group, LLC	Visit their website for distributors: amway.com/en_US/nutrilite
Olympia® Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flat Bread Gyros 	Olympia Food Industries, Inc.	Ethnic (Arab, Indo/Pak) stores and restaurants throughout the United States and Canada
Organic Valley®	Dairy Products	Organic Valley	Supermarkets throughout the United States
Peek Freans	Bakery Items	English Biscuit Manufacturers (Pvt.) Ltd.	Ethnic (Indo/Pak) stores throughout the United States and Canada

Brand	Product Type	Company Name	Available At
POM Wonderful®	Beverages / Beverage Concentrates	POM Wonderful, LLC	Supermarkets throughout the United States
Saffron Road™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appetizers • Food Products • Snack Foods 	American Halal Company, Inc.	HEB, Kroger, Publix, Target, Whole Foods, and various markets throughout the United States Visit their website to locate a store near you: saffronroad.com
Tom's of Maine	Personal Care Products	Toms of Maine, Inc.	Department stores, supermarkets, and drugstores throughout the United States
Wonderful Pistachios®	Pistachios & Almonds	Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds	Supermarkets throughout the United States



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