



AGEC-637

Kosher and Halal Slaughter

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Introduction

Kosher and halal are two distinct types of ritual slaughter observed by people practicing Jewish and Muslim religions, respectively (Barry, 2014). Specific requirements must be met for any meat to be considered “fit and proper” under these methods. While the demand for and ability to pursue these processing methods may be geographically limited, some producers may find that raising animals and offering products used in kosher and halal markets can add value to their operations.

Because of the requirements for halal and kosher slaughter and processing and the specifics of what is permitted, halal and kosher slaughter are often done by meat processors specializing in religious slaughter or by individuals who buy directly from ranchers to slaughter the animals themselves. These specific requirements for religious slaughter may lead to additional costs. These additional costs could be the higher labor costs associated with a specialty processor, higher than normal transportation costs or the different production costs associated with the type of animal (e.g., bulls vs. heifers). Because of these differences, producers must determine pricing based on their costs of production and desired profit. It is important to note there is a varying degree of observance for certain aspects of halal and kosher. Some elements are open to interpretation, and what is acceptable within one community may not be in another. Developing an understanding of cultural and religious nuances is essential for effective marketing of products to serve these communities.

Kosher Requirements

Permitted animals and cuts of meat

An animal is considered kosher if it is a ruminant (i.e., chews a cud) and has split or cloven hooves. This includes all species of cattle, sheep, goats, deer and antelope, both wild and domesticated. Swine have a split hoof but do not chew a cud. Camel, rabbits and coney chew cud but do not have a split hoof. Equines do not have split hooves. Therefore, pigs, camel, rabbits, coney and equine are not kosher. Animals living in the water that do not have fins and scales are also not kosher (Barry, 2014). The Torah does not give signs for kosher birds, but instead lists 24 classes of non-kosher birds. In general, kosher birds are not a bird of prey and have an extra toe or talon, a crop, and/or a gizzard that can be peeled. It is a point of debate whether all three of the signs must be present. In general, domesticated poultry species, such as chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, pigeons and doves are considered “fit” for kosher food. Ostriches, birds of prey (e.g., hawks, owls, eagles) and carrion-eating birds (e.g., vultures, ravens, seagulls, etc.) are examples of birds that are not considered “fit” for kosher food (Shurpin, 2017).

The sciatic nerve and adjoining blood vessels may not be eaten (Genesis 32:22-32) (Genesis 32:22-32). If the nerve is properly removed, then the hindquarter of the animal can be eaten. However, due to costliness and time constraints, many U.S. butchers will sell the hind quarters for non-kosher purposes. In other countries, such as Israel, where there is less demand for non-kosher meat, the sciatic nerve is likely to be removed, allowing the sale of hind quarters. Nikkur is the process of removing veins, the sciatic nerve and cheilev (Abramowitz, 2024). Cheilev is the word for fat that is prohibited from consumption. This fat (mostly fat of the kidney and intestines) was historically burned at the altar in the case of sacrifices (Abramowitz, 2024). Animals for which this type of fat cannot be consumed include the ox, sheep and goat.

Production Practices

To be considered kosher, these permitted animals and birds must be raised and slaughtered in a humane way. There are varying degrees of interpretation for certain production practices, such as castration, dehorning and tail docking. For example,

under some kosher interpretations, a Jewish person cannot castrate, and a Gentile cannot be told to castrate an animal, but if it has already been castrated then it is accepted (Shulchan, 2024). Currently, most livestock intended to be sold for meat are castrated and dehorned, and sheep have their tails docked. Each of these are done for different reasons. Male animals are castrated because it prevents mating or fighting, improves carcass quality and makes the animals more gentle and easier to work with. The castration timeline and method vary based on animal species. Dehorning is the process of removing or mechanically preventing the growth of horns on an animal. This is done to improve appearance, reduce injuries caused to other animals and increase feeder space. Tail docking is the process of removing an animal's tail. It is done to improve appearance and increase hygiene. Techniques of docking can vary from species to species (Faries, 2024; Stotts, 2021). Producers who do not participate in the standard practices regarding castration, dehorning of animals and tail docking of sheep might face discounts if the animals are sold through regular sale barn outlets.

Slaughter Process

Animals must be slaughtered precisely by a “shochet,” a very pious trained and certified (or licensed) Jew. Often, this role is filled by a rabbi. During the slaughter process, the animal must be completely conscious. Residual blood must be purged (kosherization) and is often achieved by a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a very sharp knife. The knife (chalaf) cannot have nicks or unevenness, and this method results in the rapid complete draining of blood (which must not be collected). Glatt kosher (the strictest form) is considered to be the standard by some but an additional level of kosher by others. The lungs of the animal are inspected to ensure they are smooth (glatt). Any defects found in the lungs will result in the animal being considered (treif), and therefore non-kosher. This idea extends to other treif such as broken bones, punctures or cuts and terminal illnesses. Some Jewish communities, such as Orthodox Jews, will only consume glatt kosher, while others do not have this requirement (Shimoni, 2022). Glatt kosher meat is salted and soaked within 72 hours of slaughter. The soaking of meat in salt and water also serves to remove residual blood. To be labeled with a kosher insignia and sold as kosher meat, the slaughter/processing facility must be certified as kosher by an accredited certification organization.

There are no certified kosher slaughter facilities in Oklahoma. Oklahoma producers wishing to raise animals for kosher slaughter may have to reach out to a kosher processor directly and enter into binding contract. Due to the lack of kosher facilities in Oklahoma and the lack of demand for new producers by kosher processors outside the state, kosher slaughter is not a viable method for Oklahoma producers at this time.

Halal Requirements

Permitted animals and cuts of meat

Again, there are different interpretations and beliefs within subsets of the Islamic faith regarding what is halal (lawful) or haram (unlawful) for consumption. In general, animals that have clearly been prohibited by the Qur'an or Sunnah are not permitted. This includes swine and donkeys. Horses are a point of debate and may or may not be considered halal. Mules and hinnies (i.e., hybrid crosses between donkeys and horses) are even less clear cut with some saying it depends on the species of the mother. All types of fish are halal with the exception of fish found dead and rotten in the water. Animals that have no blood, such as hornets, flies, spiders, beetles and scorpions are not halal. The one exception is locusts. Snakes, lizards and chameleons are considered animals with blood that does not flow and is not halal. Any type of pest is haram, such as mice and hedgehogs. Permitted animals include land-animals that have flowing blood, survive on grass and leaves and do not prey on other animals. Examples include camels, cows, goats, buffalos, sheep and deer. Predatory animals that hunt with their teeth are haram, such as lions, cheetahs, tigers, leopards, wolves, foxes, dogs and cats. All birds of prey (birds that hunt with their claws/talons) are considered haram. Examples include falcons, eagles, kites, hawks and bats. Any bird that does not hunt with claws and does not prey on other animals, such as chickens, ducks, doves, sparrows and crows, are permitted. It is important to consider the differences between kosher and halal animals. For example, rabbits, ostriches, and camels are halal but not kosher (Adam, 2011).

Although some websites may state that the hindquarter is not halal, this is not a statement made in the Quran. Islam considers the entire cattle or sheep halal if correctly slaughtered (Fiqh, 2011). Blood is not permitted for consumption with the exception of liver and spleen (Adam, 2011).

Production Practices

Under Islam, animals consumed for food can be castrated if it is done for a sound purpose and with minimal harm (Fiqh, 2011). All animals must be healthy and have no signs of physical trauma at the time of slaughter. In general, animals must be treated in a humane manner. Animals cannot be beaten, abused or made to stay in traumatic conditions. All animals must be given natural feed (TCCMT, 2024).

Slaughter Process

For slaughter, the slaughterer must be either Muslim or from the People of the Book (someone of the Christian or Jewish faith) (Alliance of America Halal Food Standards, 2024). In addition, the name of Allah must be said at the time of slaughter while facing Mecca, and the halal prayer must be said for each animal (Hussaini, 2022). There is some debate regarding the use of a captive bolt. In some cases, it is said the animal must be first slaughtered with an incision below the glottis with a swift cut

severing the esophagus, trachea and the jugular veins. Post cut stunning may be applied where required with approval of the halal authority. Examples of restraining boxes are available in the halal guidelines from the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians (TCCMT, 2024).

There are some processing plants that offer halal slaughter of certain species in Oklahoma. Some Muslims may slaughter their animals on their own and have them further processed by processors that are not exclusively halal plants. Because of this, Muslim communities or individuals may reach out to ranchers to buy livestock directly. All animals that are slaughtered must have their carcasses disposed of properly (ODAFF, 2024).

Conclusion

In any live animal slaughter, the rules regarding inspection must still be followed if the meat is intended to be sold. Meat from a federally inspected facility can be sold as individual cuts and shipped anywhere in the U.S. or internationally (if properly permitted). Meat from a state inspected facility can be sold as individual cuts but cannot be sold outside of the state where it was processed. Meat that is processed via the custom-exempt method or on farm cannot be sold and must be consumed by the owner of the animal (Yates, 2022).

When considering value-added decisions, it is important to make sure the options are feasible and fit for specific operations. While kosher is not feasible for Oklahoma producers, halal may help provide a varied source of income for your operation. Also, remember that although religious slaughter has some additional requirements, it still must follow all state and federal inspection requirements.

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