

ANIMAL HANDLING: RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER

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

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

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

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

Kosher Slaughter

Slaughter performed under Jewish law is referred to as Kosher slaughter. The basic requirements for Kosher slaughter are found in the first five books of the Bible, but the methods are codified in more detail in a text known as the Talmud, which represents captures oral laws communicated to Moses with the Ten Commandments. The text includes detailed anatomical information to instruct Jewish people about the slaughter process and how to inspect an animal immediately after slaughter to ensure that it is healthy and fit for consumption.

Kosher dietary laws address three issues:

1. Prohibited and permitted animals – Ruminants with split hooves that chew their cud, traditional domestic birds, and fish with fins and removable scales are generally permitted. Pigs, wild

birds (including ratites), sharks, dogfish, catfish, monkfish, and similar species, as well as crustacean and molluscan shellfish are prohibited. Most insects are also not considered Kosher.

2. Prohibition of blood - blood from permitted or non-permitted animals may not be consumed.

3. Prohibition of mixing milk and meat

There are two primary differences between Kosher slaughter and standard slaughter. Kosher slaughter is performed by a specially trained person known as a "shochet." The shochet performs the slaughter process using a long, razor-sharp knife known as a "chalef" that cuts the esophagus, the trachea, the carotid arteries, and the jugular veins with a single smooth cut. In contrast to non-religious slaughter, the animal is not stunned prior to slaughter.

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

Halal Slaughter

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

1. Prohibited and permitted animals – the meat from swine is strictly prohibited, as is meat from carnivorous animals like lions, tigers, dogs, cats, and birds of prey. Meat from domesticated animals with a split hoof, like cattle, sheep, goat, lamb, buffalo, and camel, is permitted. Birds that do not use their claws to hold down food, like chickens and turkeys, may be consumed. Laws governing foods from the sea are variable under Muslim law. Eggs and milk from permitted animals may be consumed. Unlike Kosher, there is no prohibition on mixing milk and meat.

2. Prohibition of blood – blood from permitted or prohibited animals may not be consumed.

3. **Method of slaughter** — Islam emphasizes the gentle treatment of animals, especially before and during slaughter. Animals dying due to strangulation or falls, and animals dedicated to other religions are forbidden under the Quran. In addition, any Muslim may slaughter his own animal by invoking the name of Allah, the one God, but the animal generally may not be stunned prior to slaughter. Halal slaughter involves cutting the throat in a manner that induces rapid and complete bleeding and the quickest death possible.

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

Animal Welfare Innovations

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

Today, however, most religiously slaughtered cattle in U.S. plants are slaughtered in an upright position. Specially designed upright restraint devices have now found widespread acceptance in the religious communities. These restraints enable religious officials to perform a cut swiftly and painlessly that causes rapid unconsciousness while the animal is standing. Once the cut is performed and the animal is unconscious, it can be hoisted. Some Muslims accept a “reversible head only” type of stunning which causes temporary unconsciousness, usually induced by electric stunning. This type of stunning is only acceptable to Muslims if it allows an animal to regain consciousness within a minute and to eat within five minutes. This process is adequate to ensure that animals are insensible to pain, if only temporarily.

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