



News From Europe - October 2006

Growing Muslim Population in Europe Spurs Market for Halal Food Products

By TED SHOEMAKER, QFFI Correspondent



Faithful prefer traditional Middle Eastern fare like kebabs – but also burgers and pizza.

In the last half-century, Western Europe's Muslim population has exploded from less than 250,000 to between 15 and 20 million. And to many of these people the food they eat must be halal, prepared under the dietary laws of their religious faith.

Until recently, most European food producers have paid relatively little attention to this market, and Muslims have had a real problem getting food they're allowed to eat. This was particularly the case with meat, which had to come from animals that were slaughtered in a certain way. But it extended to other foods as well. The french fries may have been prepared with fat from animals that were not properly slaughtered. Or the cake may have contained prohibited gelatin from pigs.

Faithful Muslims had to stick to safe vegetarian diets, or shop in special stores that imported halal products from the Middle East. Such outlets seldom had snacks, hamburgers, pizza and other tasty treats that transplanted Muslims and their Europe-born brethren saw around them and craved.

Today, food manufacturers in Europe are becoming more aware of this market, and of the fact that Middle Eastern and Asian Muslims, some of whom are now as affluent as Europeans, if not more so, would like to buy their products. Since most of the food involved is meat, the product is usually frozen.

Two European companies that cater largely to the halal market are Mekkafood Halal Products of Nettetal-Kaldenkirchen, Germany, and Tahira Foods Ltd. of London. Apetito of Rheine, Germany, has added halal products to the "Meals on Wheels" menus it delivers to senior citizens in the Netherlands. And Salomon FoodWorld of Grossostheim-Ringheim, Germany, offers Ranch Master Kebab "Halal" as a foodservice item. FRoSTA of Hamburg reports that it is actively studying the possibility of introducing halal products Europe-wide.

McCain Deutschland of Eschborn has issued public assurances that its potato products are made exclusively with plant oils, and Nestlé has put out a list of its products that Muslims can safely eat.



King-size Chicken Burgers are a bargain from Mekkafood.

Halal is an Arabic word meaning "allowed." As with kosher foods, no pork is permitted. Muslim law also decrees that food can contain no carrion, no blood and no wine or other alcoholic ingredients. And the name of Allah must be pronounced at the moment of slaughter.

Animals must be bled to death, and nothing may be done to stun them. It's forbidden in Germany to refrain from stunning animals, so meat for halal products sold there once had to be imported from other countries. In 2002, however, the German high court ruled that an allowed exception to the law, for "compulsory laws of a religious community," applied to Muslims.



Since then a number of Muslim slaughterhouses have sprung up in Germany, and there is also an accredited certifying organization in the country: Halal Control of Rüsselsheim (www.halalcontrol.de). It has 11 workers who visit slaughterhouses and packing plants, making sure employees are educated on halal principles. They review the production process, evaluate the ingredients and additives, and review the sanitation and hygiene procedures. They also send samples to laboratories, which check products out, through DNA and other procedures, for pork, alcohol or other forbidden content.



Döner Kebaps are another popular specialty from Mekkafood.

which are small grilled rolls of minced beef or lamb popular in the parts of the Balkans once controlled by the Ottoman Empire.

And there is Döner Kebap, from a big rotating roll of compressed, marinated lamb. When sliced with a long, sharp knife, it can be placed in folded pita bread with vegetables to create what is now among the most popular fast food items in Europe. Needless to say, the more non-Muslim customers Mekkafood gets the happier it is.

Hamburgers are still popular enough with Muslims to make a big market, and Mekkafood serves it with a Halal Beefburger. It also offers Bratwurst, grill items and snacks to non-Muslims as well as Muslims who have acquired a taste for them. The Beefburger is sometimes spiced in a Middle Eastern way.

All packages are marked with a logo assuring customers that the contents are halal. Distribution is through Mekkafood's own refrigerated trucks, and it supplies refrigerated display cases to customers who want them. This is partly because many of the small Turkish stores in Germany don't otherwise have facilities for frozen food, and partly because it's good advertising.

Mekkafood currently employs 110 persons and has German branch operations in Mannheim, Munich and Berlin; plus Venlo, the Netherlands, and Mechele, Belgium. Sale of its product line is by no means restricted to Mideast-oriented specialty shops or exclusively-halal stores. Distribution outlets in Europe include the Edeka, Rewe, Metro, Spar and Lidl supermarket chains.

Tahira, with a head office in London, has a distribution infrastructure composed of depots, coldstores and a fleet of delivery vans. These are located in the United Kingdom (London and Manchester), France (Paris, Lille and Lyon), Germany (Hamburg, Stuttgart, Berlin and Siegburg), Holland (Breukelen) and Sweden (Malmo). Distribution elsewhere is handled by independent wholesalers in Denmark, Italy, Spain, Ireland and Austria.

Tahira's halal products show that current frozen food trends apply equally to them. It has miniaturized the traditional kebab to fit in with the snack trend, and also offers a Mexican snack. The company meets the trend to pizzas with non-Italian toppings with an Asian-style pizza.

Mekkafood Halal Products started out in 1993, by putting some halal snacks on the market. Since then production has grown steadily, and today it serves approximately 8,000 restaurants and food markets in Europe with some 30 frozen meat products. In the spring of 2005 it opened a production facility in Nettetal-Kaldenkirchen, with enough capacity to handle up to 400 tons a week.

The company produces mainly frozen chicken, lamb and beef specialties. One of its traditional Mideast dishes is Lahmacun, better known as "Turkish Pizza" when topped with beef, onions, parsley and tomato purée. Another is Cevapcici,



Multi-Kulti kebaps from appetito are served with couscous and vegetables.

Halal food from apetito is part of the series of “Multi Kulti-Menüs” featuring international dishes that the company introduced through its Meals on Wheels program in the Netherlands during 2004. It was discovered that many of the senior citizens the program serves were Turks or other Muslims who had resided in Europe a long time. These dishes are also available at Dutch facilities for the handicapped.

There were originally seven Multi-Kulti menus, leaning to chicken, beef and rice dishes with curry, coconut and even chili sauces. They have proved so popular that a whole new range of oriental specialties, including Turkish Shish, were introduced in the spring of 2006. All of the Multi-Kulti dishes bear the stamp of the Halal-Korrekt certifying organization. bear the stamp of the Halal-Korrekt certifying organization.

Dutch Coldstore Offers Dedicated Space for Halal Food Products

Eurofrigo BV has opened a new facility for halal food storage and distribution at its refrigerated warehouse in the Port of Rotterdam’s Maasvlakte section. Two dedicated rooms with approximately 1,000 pallet places are now available for both frozen and refrigerated foodstuffs that have been prepared and processed in accordance with stipulations that conform to Islamic law.



The project was started in conjunction with VAT Logistics BV of Rotterdam, which will take care of all non-frozen halal foodstuffs. Certification was arranged in September by Halal Audit Company, with approval from the Dutch Association for Halal Certification.

Eurofrigo BV in Rotterdam, a subsidiary of Nichirei Corporation, has dedicated two chambers exclusively for the storage of frozen and refrigerated halal foodstuffs.

“The initial focus is mainly on imports from Malaysia and Indonesia, which are the leading halal food producing countries,” said Derk van Mackelenbergh, managing director of the coldstore (Phone: +31 10491 3100). “Eurofrigo trusts the supply chain of halal products will be extended and improved with our dedicated storage facilities, which are the first of their kind in northwestern Europe.”

Demand for certified halal foodstuffs is increasing in many parts of the world. The global market for such products was estimated to be worth \$150 billion in 2005, with the UK alone accounting for \$4 billion in sales. GCC countries in the Middle East import halal food valued at more than \$12 billion per annum.

The market has a wide customer base that extends beyond nations with majority Muslim populations. Worldwide, there are approximately two billion consumers who share the Islamic faith. As a demographic group, they spread across countries, typical diets and income groups, creating both a marketing and distribution challenge for exporters.

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