

DOST contends with Philippine Halal issues Claps back with webcast series

Following a longer pause than expected after WHO declared the COVID-19 disease in 2020 as a pandemic, DOST is visibly boosting efforts on its Halal S&T Program to overcome issues attendant to the industry.

On June 29 to 30, 2021, the Industrial Technology Development Institute (DOST-ITDI) will be conducting a webcast series on Halal Awareness and Halal Critical Control Points (CCPs).

The series aims to increase public awareness, enthusiasm, and support for food processing following the halal way.

Halal ABCs

For first-time readers, halal or "permissible" food refers to food items and beverages prepared according to rules underlined by the Islamic dietary law.

Complementary to this, drinking alcohol and eating blood, pork, by-products of pork and blood, animals that are dead before slaughtering, and those not killed in the name of Allah are haram or "forbidden." All other foods and beverages are therefore halal.

Moreover, it instructs that halal food products be packaged and stored in utensils that have been cleaned as per prescribed guidelines.

Although the term halal food usually refers to meat and food products processed the halal way, halal is also used for other commodities such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, textiles, and others.

Contrary to most beliefs that halal food is a Muslim-associated food preference, Business Wire Inc., based in California, USA, valued the global halal food market at US\$1.9 Trillion in 2020. It also noted that halal food items have been becoming popular amongst Muslim and non-Muslim consumers as they have evolved from being a food preference to assurance of food safety, hygiene, and reliability. Food safety, for example, is assured

every time as

slaughtered halal animals undergo two health checks compared to single inspections performed on conventional animals.

The Halal logo - It matters if it is 'Tayyib'

As they say, there is no good or bad publicity. Either will still deliver the popularity or notoriety that one desires.

Currently, in the news is an issue with one product being sold as halal but is made from pure pork. As reported in The Manila Times on June 22, 2021, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), responsible for developing the Philippine halal industry and accrediting halal-certifying entities, suddenly finds itself at the end of public backlash.

And so, while Islamic dietary laws specifically instruct on the consumption of food and other products, which are considered as halal or lawful, is there a way to verify actual halalness of products such that pork products may not masquerade as lamb, beef, or any other meat?

Yes, there is. Under the DOST Halal S&T Program, ITDI has developed a Halal Assurance System (HAS) for specific products. Included in HAS is the stipulation to identify Halal Critical Control Points (CCPs) or critical activities.

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program, a partnership of 11 countries and development partners, defines Halal CCPs as "any identified points within the operation, preparation, or processing of halal meat or food that otherwise might lead to a religiously unacceptable situation or 'Najasah.'" To avoid condemnation of the product, a control is placed.

On the other hand, the industry-based food safety protocol HACCP or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points ensures safety by controlling major food risks, such as microbiological, chemical, and physical contaminants.

Halal CCP is HACCP-based quality assurance system. It uses the HACCP criteria for safety, religious dietary requirement, and quality. This approach harmonizes and unifies halal processing with the quality assurance system of the food industry.

For good measure, while the halal logo certifies that a product has rigorously followed the halal way of preparation or processing, it matters that the food product is 'tayyib.'

Tayyib is often translated as "wholesome" or "good." Today, tayyib carries a specific connotation. It refers to halal food that is nutritious, healthy, clean, and "ethically sourced."

The most used definitions for tayyib are wholesome, good, pleasant, excellent, fair, lawful, pure, and clean, an indication that your halal product does not magically reveal itself to be pork. Fruits and vegetables, if tayyib, could indicate that these are organic, pesticide-free, or non-GMO.

Ensuring 'halalness' of processed products

While DOST Regional Offices have steered the DOST Halal S&T Program by establishing verification services, ITDI Director Dr. Annabelle V. Briones is charting another course.

She said that "We aim to support the country's bid to become one of the world's Halal industry champions. True to our mandate as a research and service institute, the way to do it is to strengthen the market competitiveness of halal processed products by ensuring their authenticity or 'halalness'."

ITDI is doing this through compliance to international and local halal processing standards, including establishing Halal CCP in halal-certified companies since standards, regulatory, and conformity requirement can become technical barriers to the halal trade. When Philippine halal processed products conform to, say, the ASEAN Qualification Framework, companies can be more confident that they can enter the local halal market and other foreign halal markets.

The Food Processing Division of ITDI drafted a HAS Manual to process bananas as chips, catsup, and frozen saba. Product Development Head Ma. Elsa M. Falco explained that banana was an easy choice as it is the Philippines' second top export.

In 2020, FPD added a new facility in its string of service units - the Halal Food R&D Facility. Falco's team is currently using this to test and verify conditions and clauses in the HAS Manual for Banana Products.

Aside from these, FPD formed a team with Lourdes S. Montevirgen of the Food Safety

Section to develop halal processed bakery products. These include loaf bread and *pan de sal*. Likewise, Montevirgen is verifying the HAS Manual for Bread and Pastries in the Halal Food R&D Facility

Meanwhile, Michelle E. Evaristo, also of the Food Safety Section, is working on emulsified meat products in the form of sausages, nuggets, and burgers.

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And so, as the country embraces the new halal market and processing system, the DOST Halal S&T Program is, in conjunction, giving the public a fuller account of halal. This is to improve the goodwill and integrity of halal-certified companies in the market, yet instilling best practices in the industry to foster public faith.
(AMGuevarra// DOST-ITDI S&T Media Service)

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