

## Summary

The EU-GCC Business and Trade Cooperation Facility organized a roundtable on the new UAE Halal Scheme and the consequences for the European Union food industry and Halal Certifying Bodies the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2016.

The recent introduction of the UAE scheme for Halal food products introduced by the Emirates Authority for Standardisation and Metrology (ESMA) highlighted the need for dialogue on the pace of and how the new rules will be interpreted. A concern for the European food industry has been the short transition period to implement the new scheme. It will accordingly require rapid action not only by the European food industry, but equally the Halal Certifying Bodies (CB) for them to live up to the new standards. The importance of the Round Table was all the more important seeing that the standard has the potential to be adopted, with minor adjustments, by other GCC countries.

The first session consisted of a presentation by Dr Maeeni of the new ESMA Halal standard. It was highlighted that the standard was unique in several aspects. Key among these being the division of work between the setter of the standard, accreditation bodies, and certifying bodies. Hence, CBs has to be accredited by an accrediting body that has been approved and accredited by ESMA. (At present two European accrediting bodies has been approved to undertake the process). It is recommended that CBs approach the relevant accreditation body as soon as possible to start the process for them to meet the July deadline.

The second aspect highlighted was that exporters of food products has to be re-certified by March 2017. Hence, all producers wishing to export to the UAE from that date must be certified according to the new standard. The principle difference to the existing standard is that the new standard is 80% related to health and food requirements and the remaining 20% is sharia Halal related. As a corollary and a testament to the standard, the CB can only certify a given producer if all inputs have been certified by accredited CBs. Thus ensuring the farm to fork principle.

The second part was focused on the CBs and provided an overview of the certification process and a practical example of how the first European CB had achieved its certification.

## 1 Opening remarks

The roundtable was formally opened by Mr. Peter Helk Project Manager from the Confederation of Danish Industry. He explained how the EU-GCC Business and Trade Cooperation Facility has been following the development of the new Halal scheme and encouraged European business' to do the same. Depending on the outcome of the Round Table he advocated for establishing a task force to further investigate the possibilities to enter a dialogue with ESMA on the implementation in the European Union.

Additionally, Mr. Helk promoted the business forum in Brussels the 24<sup>th</sup> of May.

## 2 Presentation of the new UAE Halal scheme by Dr Abdulla Al Maeeni Director General ESMA

Dr. Abdulla Al Maeeni, Director General at ESMA presented the structure of ESMA and answered questions.

- *Accreditation bodies.* For the first time accreditation and certification is separated. The standard complies with ISO/IEC 17011.
- *Certification body* will be audited by an accrediting body. CBs will be penalised if a fault is registered and proves to be structural, e.g. if a manufacturer fails to comply with the Halal requirements.
- *Factories* and *slaughterhouses* can refer to ESMA's data-base when approved and sell/buy when the old certificate is not valid any longer.
- In UAE there will be an *importer/distributor*. It is also their responsibility that products imported follow Halal standards.
- The *data base* will be updated to include all the accreditation and certifications.

Dr. Maeeni underlines that everything from farm to fork should be Halal (incl. feed given to e.g. cattle). It was noted that the standard whereas 80% is related to health and food requirements, the remaining 20% are sharia Halal requirements.

Dr. Maeeni answered questions from the roundtable and they can be summarized as follows:

- a) Is ESMA the sole certifier in the UAE?  
ESMA is not a sole national standard body doing certification in the UAE. ESMA have accredited certifiers.
- b) What does the global tendencies look like?  
SEMIC (TC1 standard) are all moving towards this system of ESMA. UAE started ahead of everybody else. The GCC countries is following one standard and one accreditation, but other countries are starting to implement the same requirements. 90% of the standards will be the same, however national differences will be included in an annex. Specific product standards (depending on countries e.g. stunning) differ.
- c) Where should a company certify its products (not slaughterhouses)  
There is no need to send representatives to the UAE. ESMA will make sure that all CBs across the world work according to the same standards. A German factory should for instance approach a certifier in Germany (or the nearest certifier).  
It should be noted that it is also mandatory to certify Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. It is foreseen that Halal certification will be introduced for textiles, leather and detergents.
- d) Where should Slaughterhouses register for certification?  
Whereas other types of food products can be certified by CBs residing in other countries, the slaughterhouses has to be certified by a CB with an accredited office in the specific country allow for daily inspections.
- e) One major concern for the industry is the urgency and the time pressure.  
The UAE started talking to the EU March 2015. It was explained that the EU had almost two years to comply with this certification, hence the deadlines demanded were considered realistic. Hence, by August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 all certification bodies wishing to have the capacity to issue halal certifications in accordance with the measure must be registered with ESMA. All CBs shall be accredited in accordance with the certification scheme of ESMA before January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. - Non-compliant certificates will not be recognised any more by UAE authorities after February 2017. However, it was noted that there could be necessary flexibility on the timeline if EU representatives fear market disruption. In this case a dialogue with ESMA is needed.
- f) The certification vs. the Halal mark/branding/marketing.  
In the UAE Halal certification is required (the certificate). However, the mark is voluntary, but has to adhere to the standard issued by ESMA. Hence, if there is going to be any reference to Halal branding/writing on the products it can only be the UAE Halal mark, The

reason is that all products should by default be Halal; hence the mark is simply a marketing tool (a levy will be imposed on using the mark). However, ESMA suggest that if the producer exports to other countries than UAE to use the marks.

### 3 How to be accredited. Requirements for Halal certification bodies

Dr. Maeeni presented the accreditation system, and emphasized that it is completely different from what the CBs are used to. Hence, it is suggested to read the slides carefully before submitting. It should be noted that registrations need to be renewed every year, but accreditation (depending on the body) is every 3rd year.

Dr. Maeeni Strongly encourage everybody to read the standards as soon as possible because it will take a long time to get certified.

### 4 Presentation Accredia on the process of obtaining certification under the UAE Halal Scheme by Mr Emmanuel Rive

Mr Rive presented how they achieved their UAE accreditation. It is important that there is only one AB in each country, so that competition between the ABs can be avoided. Certification bodies need to address the national accreditation body before approaching for instance Accredia.

Accredia used two teams, one from GAC (working on religious issues) and one from Accredia (on food hygiene requirements) to obtain the accreditation. If the certification body is discredited, this will not affect the producer/factories. These will have a time period to move creditor.

The following are the questions that was addressed to Mr Emmanuel Rive.

- a) Accredia involved an Imam who is involved in Halal certification in their board, does this pose any conflict of interest?  
When Accredia receive an application, all actors have to declare if there are conflicts of interests. Board of directors finds it valuable and important to have a competent person to inform them about what Halal.
- b) How does Accredia position themselves in terms of the usage of the credit?  
ABs do not deal with the usage of the certificates. They focus on the accreditation of certifiers.
- c) What has the expense of the transition for Accredia been?  
Mr Riva argues that the prices change and depend on the process. How many days of witnessing, reporting etc. is needed to ensure the AB has confidence in the CB.
- d) If the certification of an accrediting company is revoked, what happens to the CB and the other companies?  
Once again Mr. Rive argues how it depends on the problem. For example, if it is an isolated issue, then the incident will not have any consequences for the other companies. If the problem concerns the CBs then the other certificates might not be reliable any more.

## 5 Accreditation on HFFIA (1975) by ESMA and GAC from the Netherlands by Yasmina Ben Koubia

Ms Yasmina Ben Koubia from the Dutch Accredited Certifier HFFIA explained the process of accreditation from ESMA and GAC. Ms. Koubias presentation mainly focused on the challenges and learning curve of their process. Ms Koubia also underlined that the points mentioned in the standards are a minimum (e.g. in terms of the 2 Islamic experts)

The requirements are easy to follow and well-written, however it is difficult to implement these within a short time frame. In other words, this is where companies should invest.

Highlighted positive changes included in the new UAE standard:

- The Impartiality committee, regarding the challenging point of the ISO 17.065 to prove the CB is not involved in the companies the CB are certifying.
- Transparent QMS, and to have it standardized through your work including in the documents you use
- Clear requirements of the top management and personnel.
- Complete certification decision and evaluation process.
- Referencing to 17065, which is good for the organization, because they know they already follow these UAE standards that refer to the ISO standards.
- You have to have Islamic people from the local community as well as Islamic experts in the impartiality committee. If you do not have this already, your company will need to invest and train the personnel.

## 6 Recommendation

There is no doubt that the introduction of the UAE Halal Scheme will have a significant impact on the European food industry and CBs alike. At present, April 2015, a total of one CB has been accredited according to the scheme. An award that was achieved after a period of six months and having undertaken a significant upgradation of their management system and personnel. As such it must be foreseen that the accreditation of the CBs will draw out and that there will be a back log of companies by March 2017 needing certification – not least assuming that the farm to fork principle will be upheld in totality.

It is recommended that the European food industry initiate a discussion, based on a careful analysis of the cost and speed with the scheme can be implemented, with ESMA to seek an extension of the implementation period covering both CBs and the food industry. It is equally suggested to initiate a dialogue with ESMA on the raw materials where a certificate is needed.