



Why Access to Halal Foods is a Matter of Food Security: Barriers & Proposed Policy Interventions

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Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA)

The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) appreciates the opportunity to submit ideas to the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Below, you will find an outline of the work we do to address food and health inequities, the challenges and barriers we face, and the solutions and policy interventions we propose.

IFANCA is a not-for-profit organization based in Des Plaines, Illinois, committed to helping consumers and industries source authentic halal products since 1982. IFANCA's primary mission is to promote halal by helping industries produce halal-certified products, increasing awareness through education, and building and supporting institutions. Operating with a team of Islamic scholars, scientists, and industry experts, IFANCA is a trusted organization on all halal matters related to food, nutrition, and pharmaceutical products for over 1.8 billion consumers globally. Its Crescent-M certification mark assures consumers that a product is halal.

Why Halal?

- Access to halal food is a matter of food security for over 1.8 billion consumers worldwide ([Pew Research Center](#), “World’s Muslim population more widespread than you might think, 2017”). A study conducted in collaboration with the Illinois Muslim Civic Coalition found that 94% of Muslims in the Chicago metropolitan area cite following halal guidelines as a core value (“[Illinois Muslims Report](#),” July 2022). The study examines American Muslims’ food and beverage spending habits and buying behaviors with regard to halal products.
- According to a 2022 Halal Food Market report produced by [Future Market Insights](#), the halal food market is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 9.7% through 2032. The report states that this is partly due to increased demand for halal food amongst Muslims and non-Muslims consumers across global markets.
- The observance of halal extends beyond meat; it is an institution and a comprehensive quality management system, with clear religious guidelines that have been practiced for many centuries. These guidelines span the supply chain from farm to point of delivery, including: procurement, preparation, sanitation, storage, and handling.
- Lack of access to halal food leads to food insecurity. Some of the implications of food insecurity are physical, social, intellectual and emotional well-being. Many Muslims choose to forego nutrition security in order to maintain their religious values. This observation is supported by a student survey conducted at Sullivan High School, a Chicago Public School located in a low-income area of Chicago. The majority of students at Sullivan are Muslim and come from immigrant and refugee families. Out of the 90 students surveyed, 100% shared that halal is important to them, and 87.9% indicated that it is “very important” to them. Over 80% indicated that they “always or

often feel hungry because there are no suitable halal food options at school.” Nearly three quarters of students shared that their “nutritional needs are [never or rarely] met by the current halal options at school” (“Halal School Survey, Sullivan HS,” 2021-22).

- Ensuring access to available, accessible, affordable, and high-quality protein from animals that meet halal standards plays a significant role in closing the protein and nutrient gap that affects vulnerable members of the Muslim community, including underrepresented minority groups, women, children, and the elderly. Under-consumed nutrients by these groups may include but are not limited to: protein, potassium, vitamin B12, iron, zinc, selenium, choline, and other key nutrients - all of which can be easily provided by affordable, accessible, and culturally appropriate halal animal proteins.
- However, it is often challenging to find a reliable, recognized supplier of halal animal proteins, as this requires extensive vetting. There are also no regulations around who can be a halal certifier, which means that any individual or organization can start a certifying body and produce a certificate and logo. In order to develop trust amongst halal consumers, it is critical that there is appropriate oversight to make sure that the approved suppliers have the proper credentials.

Addressing Food and Nutrition Insecurity: Ongoing Initiatives with Partners

IFANCA is committed to putting an end to food insecurity by ensuring access to culturally appropriate, affordable, and accessible foods.

- IFANCA is the lead funder for a study being conducted by the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics** that seeks to identify and address food insecurity amongst college students in the U.S.
- In partnership with **Chicago Public Schools**, IFANCA is working to build a better understanding of halal foods to meet the needs of Muslim students who observe halal. Of the 90 students surveyed at Sullivan High School during the 2021-22 academic year, 100% indicated that halal is important to them.
- Together with the **USDA** and the **Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA)**, IFANCA is working to address food insecurity for K-12 and college students to create halal guidelines that can be used on a national level.
- IFANCA is the lead sponsor of a report carried out by the **Illinois Muslim Civic Coalition** in Chicago. The study aims to provide a snapshot of the largest per capita population of Muslims in the United States. According to the report, 94% of the Illinois Muslim sample reported that it was “somewhat” or “very” important that their purchase decision be halal. The full study will be released at the end of July 2022.

- The **Chicago Council of Global Affairs** has partnered with IFANCA to address a variety of issues surrounding food insecurity.
- In 2016, IFANCA provided a \$5 million endowment to **Texas A&M University** to establish a Food Diversity Innovation Program (FDIP). This is a sustainable, high-impact educational and research program focusing on religious and ethnic foods and other certified foods, as well as different dietary needs, restrictions and allergens. The goal of the program is to educate graduate and undergraduate students through direct interactions with food industries and hands-on research and product development experiences. This is the only program of its kind in the country and is helping to address food security.
- IFANCA is a founding member of **UNHCR's Islamic Philanthropy Council** in the U.S. In collaboration with UNHCR and this council, IFANCA is working to improve the livelihoods of refugees globally.
- In June 2021, IFANCA announced a \$3M grant to support **UNICEF's** ongoing efforts to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine doses to 144 countries. Funds provided by IFANCA also support UNICEF's work with the **World Health Organization**, partners and communities to address misinformation and build trust in vaccines – and the health systems delivering them.
- This is a snapshot of the **numerous partnerships and initiatives** that IFANCA is involved in. We are happy to share more about our ongoing projects and collaborations to fight hunger and address health and nutrition equity.

Challenges and Barriers to Food and Nutrition Security in Muslim Communities: Access to Halal Foods and Transparent Labeling

Limited availability, lack of affordability and inadequate access to halal options in public schools, on college campuses, and at food banks is a barrier to food and health equity for Muslims who observe halal. Additionally, lack of clarity, transparency, and trust from farm to fork in the supply chain further exacerbates food insecurity amongst this population.

The following data highlight the importance of providing culturally sensitive, affordable, and accessible halal foods in order to address hunger amongst the Muslim community:

- [Access to halal food is a matter of food security for over 1.8 billion consumers worldwide](#) (Pew Research Center, “World’s Muslim population more widespread than you might think”). A study conducted in collaboration with the Illinois Muslim Civic Coalition found that 94% of Muslims in the Chicago metropolitan area cite following halal guidelines as a core value (“[Illinois Muslims Report](#),” July 2022). The study

examines American Muslims' food and beverage spending habits and buying behaviors with regard to halal products.

- Thirty six percent of K-12 students in the U.S. are Muslim, according to the Pew Research Center ("[Educational Distribution, Religious Landscape Study](#)"), yet many school districts, including Chicago Public Schools, are failing to meet the needs of students who require halal-friendly menu options ("[CPS accused of failing to meet religious, dietary needs of Jewish and Muslim students](#)," *Chicago Sun Times*, 2022.)
- Lack of access to food at school has been found to negatively impact student's social, emotional, intellectual and physical abilities. According to [Boston Medical Center for Children's Health Watch](#), this includes their ability to perform academically, participate in after-school activities, access tutoring, and build sustainable relationships— particularly for students relying on free/reduced lunch programs ("Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness," 2012).
- In an interview with the Chicago Tribune, Asma Jarad, communications manager for Islamic Circle of North America Relief (ICNA) shares that "halal meat is the number one most needed item in food pantries and the one that's least available" ("[Muslim nonprofit donates halal meat and school supplies: 'It's number one most needed and the least available'](#)," 2021). This is because halal meat is produced on a much smaller scale than conventional meat and at higher costs. As food insecurity rates continue to rise across the country, food banks lack sufficient halal options to serve halal consumers. In efforts to fight food insecurity, it is therefore crucial to be mindful of religious dietary restrictions and culturally relevant foods.

Proposed Policy Interventions and Needs for Food and Nutrition Security Amongst At-Risk Muslim Community Members

With 1.8 billion halal consumers worldwide, IFANCA alone cannot address the increasing demand for halal food. To address food insecurity in the Muslim community and meet the growing demand for halal, we propose the following interventions:

- Work with government agencies such as the **USDA** to establish clear and standardized halal guidelines.
- Ensure that key government support programs, including **SNAP**, **WIC** and **school meals**, guarantee access to halal foods.
- Provide **governmental support**, for example through the National Institute of Health (NIH), to conduct research on food insecurity and health inequities amongst the Muslim community and halal consumers. We envision this helping to expand research projects like the one being conducted by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and sponsored by IFANCA.

- **Allocate funding** to develop the infrastructure for halal foods and supply chain oversight, including labeling, certification, and training programs.
- Prioritize **training programs** to raise awareness and knowledge of the halal diet amongst food service staff and nutrition directors at K-12 schools and universities.
- Improve food access and address food insecurity in schools by **expanding halal menu options** and **enacting policy change** to ensure that ALL students have access to halal meals.
- Revise the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization to **increase school nutrition reimbursement amounts** and enable school foodservice directors to source from local and halal producers.
- Guarantee access to halal meat products by **expanding cold storage capacity** for the nation's long-haul trucking fleet (including qualified drivers) and food banks operating in Muslim communities.
- Finally, **collaborate with organizations like IFANCA**, as well as representatives from the Muslim community, to understand the unique needs of halal consumers and the halal certification process across the supply chain.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present and highlight our work and ideas to address hunger, nutrition, and health. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Asma Ahad (she/her), asma.ahad@ifanca.org and Amelia Keleher (she/her), amelia.keleher@ifanca.org.

We look forward to reviewing the national strategy that will be released at the Conference in September.

Warm regards,

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