



# **Determination of death – and the implications for Halal**

**Survey shows over 95% of UK Islamic scholars indicated that pre-slaughter stunning would be halal-compliant if it could be shown that the procedure did not result in instantaneous death**

Halal meat is that which is deemed permissible for consumption by Muslims and, for meat to be considered Halal, it must be derived from specific animals slaughtered in line with rules enshrined in the Quran and other religious scriptures. These religious scriptures prohibit Muslims from consuming meat from animals that die before they are cut and bled out.

To gauge the level of Islamic scholarly understanding and perception of pre-slaughter stunning, Awal Fuseini of the University of Bristol School of Veterinary Science carried out a survey of Islamic scholars and Halal consumers in the UK, surveying 66 scholars and 314 Halal consumers.

Awal's survey showed that, on the perception of stunning, 69% did not think stunning is capable of reducing or abolishing the pain associated with the neck cut, whilst 58% indicated that they were not convinced that some methods of stunning were reversible, hence they put a blanket ban on all forms of stunning. On the acceptability of stunning, over 95% of the scholars indicated that stunning would be Halal-compliant if it could be shown that the procedure did not result in instantaneous death.

Said Awal: *"It is the duty of Islamic jurists to interpret the scriptures pertaining to the acceptability of different slaughter methods for Halal meat production. The criteria used for this interpretation have been reviewed extensively and published. Islamic jurists, however, have differences of opinion with regard to their interpretation of the scriptures which has meant that whilst some Muslims may recognise certain aspects of slaughter (eg pre-slaughter stunning) as Halal, others may not necessarily approve it as such."*

From an animal welfare standpoint, the slaughter of animals without stunning has been shown to compromise their welfare due to the pain associated with the neck-cut and the time to the onset of unconsciousness. Stunning is now widely accepted in many Muslim-majority countries (eg the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia). However, there is less clarity as to which methods of stunning are acceptable because of different authorities' definitions of death. The two main definitions being based on absence of a heartbeat or irreversible loss of brain function.

In a paper Awal has recently had published in the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare journal *Animal Welfare* he considers the role of the brain in consciousness,

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unconsciousness and death. His paper reviews literature about what makes meat Halal, considers the arguments put forward by proponents and opponents of pre-slaughter stunning for Halal production and examines the criteria used by Halal Certification Bodies. He concludes: *“The requirements of Halal slaughter continue to confuse meat processors, animal science researchers and Halal meat consumers due to differences of opinion regarding some aspects of the rules. The rules require animals to be alive at the time of neck-cutting but there appears to be no consensus within the Muslim community on the correct definition and assessment of death and this has resulted in several Halal standards which confuses Halal consumers and abattoir operators as to the true definition of Halal slaughter. To safeguard the welfare of animals during Halal slaughter, Islamic jurists need to agree on the rules of Halal slaughter and a definition of death so that there can be clarity of acceptable methods of stunning for Halal meat production.”*

### Further information

The full paper *The brain, unconsciousness and death: a critical appraisal with regard to Halal meat production* was published in the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) journal *Animal Welfare*. Subscribers to the journal will find this paper in Volume 28 issue 2. The full abstract of the study can be read at UFAW's website <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/the-ufaw-journal/animal-welfare>.

If you wish to read the full paper, you can visit [ingentaconnect.com](http://www.ingentaconnect.com) to access the paper for \$25 (US) plus taxes. <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/ufaw/aw>

Those purchasing the paper or choosing to subscribe to the Animal Welfare journal will be supporting UFAW's work. <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/the-ufaw-journal/subscription-rates>

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### Notes to Editors:

#### Awal Fuseini

Awal has a BSc in Agriculture from Cape Coast University in Ghana, and an MSc in Meat Science and Technology from Bristol University. He has also been the certification manager for the Halal Food Authority.

He is currently studying a PhD at the University of Bristol, funded by the Humane Slaughter Association, looking at the development of a humane, safe and Halal-compliant method of pre-cut stunning for cattle using a new type of electrical stunning, Single Pulse Ultra-high Current (SPUC).

Awal is the Halal Sector Manager for the Agriculture Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), a statutory levy board, funded by farmers, growers and others in the supply

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chain to help the industry succeed in a rapidly changing world. He works closely with levy payers and key stakeholders in the Halal sector to create a better understanding of the requirements of Halal meat production. Awal also collaborates with Halal certification bodies to understand the requirements of the major export markets with a view to facilitating the export of English beef and lamb to the global Halal market.

### **UFAW**

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals. This work relies on the support of members, subscribers and donors.

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