

9.0 Halal Certification Process & Audit Requirements

9.1 General Requirements

9.1.1 AHF has precisely defined the scope of certification in terms of Halal product/service categories according to Annex A of UAE/ GSO 2055-2:221.

9.1.2 AHF has also documented procedures for determining audit time, for each client taking into consideration Annex B of UAE/ GSO 2055-2:2021 and the other required aspects. The determination of the audit programme and any subsequent amendments shall consider the size of the organization of the client, the scope and complexity of its management system, products and processes as well as the demonstrated effectiveness of level of management system and the results of any previous audits.

9.1.3 AHF has established an audit programme for each client including two-stage initial audit, surveillance audit in the first and the second years, and recertification audit in the third year prior to expiration of certification. The three year certification cycle begins with the certification or recertification decision. When AHF is taking account of certification or other audits already granted to the client, it shall collect sufficient, verifiable information to justify, and record any adjustments to the audit programme. The Halal certificate is valid for three years and will be suspended or canceled at any time when the certified organization is found to contravene the approved halal standard and related requirements. Each site of a multisite organization is assessed and certified separately.

9.1.4 AHF certifies production that has a valid veterinary certificate issued by the State Food and Veterinary Service of the relevant state, as well as a valid certificate of assessment of the management system and production safety according to international standards (such as BRC (The British Retail Consortium Global Standard for Food Safety); IFS (International Featured Standards Food Standard); ISO 22000 (Food safety management), HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)) or at least management system and production safety system is established and implemented.

Recognition of management system assessment and production safety certificates is carried out in accordance with the following criteria:

- a. The certificate is issued by a state accreditation body or a private accreditation body with international recognition.
- b. At the time of the evaluation of the Halal Certification Application, the certificate is valid.
- c. The Client intends to renew the issued certificate.
- d. If the certificate is not renewed, the Client agrees that the validity of the issued Halal certificate may be suspended or canceled on the basis of not renewing the certificate of assessment of the management system and production safety.

Based on the availability of these certificates, AHF evaluates production solely based on the requirements and standards for Halal production.

9.1.5 The AHF Halal certification body must develop and implement detailed procedures for determining audit timelines based on various factors like the complexity of the client's operations and past audit results. The objective is to ensure that each client is allocated enough time to conduct a thorough and effective audit of their halal management system.

Key factors to consider for determining audit timelines are:

- a) The client must meet relevant Halal standards that vary based on industry and product type.
- b) Larger, more complex organizations or those with multiple products or services will require more extensive audits.
- c) Changes in technology or regulations, such as new equipment or processes, must be accounted for in the audit.
- d) Any part of production or management that is outsourced needs to be thoroughly assessed, including third-party suppliers or service providers.
- e) Issues from prior audits should guide how long the current audit might take, especially if non-conformances were found.
- f) Multiple locations or establishments increase the audit scope, requiring site-specific evaluations.

9.1.6 Each site within a multi-site organization must undergo its own independent assessment and certification. Even if the company operates under one brand or management, the halal integrity must be evaluated at each individual location due to variations in operational practices or controls.

For AHF, this ensures that all production processes, materials, and compliance measures are consistent and meet the required halal standards across all sites.

9.1.7 Application of ISO/IEC Standards: AHF adheres to the requirements outlined in ISO/IEC 17021:2015 and ISO/IEC 17065:2012 (mentioned later in sections 9.2 to 9.5) are used to ensure the integrity, impartiality, and consistency of the certification process. This means:

- a) Ensuring that audits are conducted in accordance with international guidelines for conformity assessments.
- b) Maintaining a clear structure for how assessments, reports, and decisions are made, to guarantee fairness and objectivity.

9.1.8 Following each audit, AHF will provide clients with a detailed written report. This report will follow the structure and guidelines set forth in ISO 19011, offering clients a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement

without crossing into consultancy services. For audits related to food chain operations, the audit report will specifically address food safety management systems in relation to halal requirements. Key Elements of the Report include:

- a) Findings on compliance with halal and safety standards.
- b) Identification of any non-conformities.
- c) Recommendations for corrective actions (without offering consultancy or solutions).
- d) Record of any observations or improvements related to food safety, if applicable.

9.2 Initial audit and Halal certification

9.2.1 Application for Certification Services

AHF requires the applicant for the Halal Certificate to provide detailed information concerning its legal status/entity, raw materials, operations, product safety management system related issues i.e. HACCP studies, the number of shifts and number of employees in each shift, etc. The Client should provide the following documents along with the application.

The process is initiated when an applicant makes an inquiry, or an order is received through sales activities. The applicant is informed of the basic certification process. The application form for the preparation of a financial proposal is sent to the applicant so that an application can be prepared and completed. Once receiving the filled application form, the admin team will send the filled application form to the quality and control department without making any changes. The quality department will calculate the man-days based on given information by the client in the application and send to the admin department. Applicant should submit a list of management documents and all products produced by the company.

The following are to be submitted by the Client upon initial Halal Certification to initiate the audit:

- i) A detailed production flow chart, preferably in English language, which shows the full production process of a product, which needs to be certified.
- ii) A filled in and signed Application Form, stating the following:
 - a. Name and legal status of the Client, country of registration, contact details, address of the main office and production facilities.
 - b. The scope and standards of certification.
 - c. Countries of export;
 - d. The number of personnel involved in the production of Halal products.
 - e. any subcontractors being involved in the production of Halal products.
 - f. Significant aspects of its process and operations,

- g. Any relevant legal obligations
- h. Available quality certificates, management system evaluations, etc.;
- i. List of certified products;
- j. Description of the delivery scheme of raw materials and production process.
- k. A complete list of all ingredients and raw materials used in the manufacture of products.
- l. A step-by-step product manufacturing process.

In the Application Form the Client confirms that no alcohol/ethanol or its derivatives and pork or its derivatives, ingredients and additives not Halal, Non Halal Gelatin, or non Halal rennet or other contaminant item will be used in the production of certified products and that the risk of certified product's cross-contamination with alcohol and pork or other non halal material is completely eliminated at all stages of manufacturing. The Client undertakes the responsibility to immediately inform AHF about any changes in the production of certified product(s).

iii) A completed Ingredient Matrix (raw material or ingredients description form) indicating the full compound of each product, the manufacturer and supplier of each ingredient and the availability of Halal certificates for these ingredients.

9.2.2 Application Review

9.2.2.1 AHF's Quality Department ensures that all necessary documents are provided by the Client, they are filled in and signed.

9.2.2.2 Before proceeding with the audit, AHF conducts a review of the application and supplementary information for certification to ensure that:

- a. the information about the Client and its production is sufficient for the conduct of the audit.
- b. the requirements for certification are clearly defined and documented and have been provided to the Client.
- c. any known difference in understanding between AHF and the Client is resolved.
- d. AHF has the competence and ability to perform the Certification activity.
- e. the scope of certification sought, the location(s) of the Client's operations, time required to complete audits and any other points influencing the Certification activity are taken into account (language, safety conditions, threats to impartiality, etc.).
- f. records of the justification for the decision to undertake the audit are maintained.

9.2.2.3 After reviewing the Application, AHF decides whether to accept the Application or not. If the AHF does not accept the Application for Certification due to the lack of necessary resources and/or competence of the Certification Body or non-compliance of the Client's production with the requirements on Halal production, AHF informs the Client about this and explains the reasons for the refusal (in all cases the Application review fee is non-refundable). AHF does not provide any advice on the achievement of compliance of the Client's products with the Halal standards.

9.2.2.4 The Halal Certification Technical Department continues further communication with the Client until all the necessary actions are made and/or documents are provided. All provided documents shall be reviewed by the auditors. After all the required documents are submitted, AHF determines the further certification process, calculates the preliminary audit time and develops an audit program taking into account the necessary resources for the audit.

9.2.2.5 Based on this review, AHF shall determine the competences it needs to include in its audit team and for the certification decision.

9.2.2.6 Once all necessary documentation is provided and the auditors make sure it meets the Halal requirements, the date of the on-site inspection can be agreed with the Client.

9.2.3 Initial Halal Certification Audit

AHF will follow a two-stage audit process to ensure comprehensive evaluation and adherence to halal standards. The stages are as follows:

9.2.3.1 Stage 1 Audit

9.2.3.1.1 Document Review and Outsourced Control Measures

During the stage 1 audit, AHF auditor(s) will review the documentation that pertains to both Halal requirements and any outsourced control measures, particularly within the product safety management system. The goal is to ensure that these controls conform to Halal standards and are adequate for managing risks. This also includes verifying the availability of relevant licenses and ensuring the client complies with national and international regulations.

9.2.3.1.2 Objectives of the Stage 1 Audit

The main objective of the stage 1 audit is to assess the readiness of the client for the more detailed stage 2 audit. Stage 1 audit shall be performed to

- a) audit the client's management system documentation
- b) evaluate the client's location and site-specific conditions and to undertake discussions with the client's personnel to determine the preparedness for the stage 2 audit.
- c) Review the client's status and understanding regarding requirements of the standard, in particular with respect to the identification of key performance or significant aspects, processes, objectives and operation of the management system.
- d) Collect necessary information regarding the scope of the management system, processes and location(s) of the client, and related statutory and regulatory aspects and compliance (e.g. quality, environmental, legal aspects of the client's operation, associated risks, etc.).
- e) Review the allocation of resources for stage 2 audit and agree with the client on the details of the stage 2 audit.
- f) Provide a focus for planning the stage 2 audit by gaining a sufficient understanding of the client's management system and site operations in the context of possible significant aspects.
- g) Evaluate if the internal audits and management review are being planned and performed, and that the level of implementation of the management system substantiates that the client is ready for the stage 2 audit.

9.2.3.1.3 Location of Stage 1 Audit

The stage 1 audit can be conducted at either the premises of AHF or the client's site, depending on the complexity of the production or service being audited. For categories such as A, B, F, J, H, and G (Annex A), it is not mandatory for the stage 1 audit to be on-site. However, for categories C, D, E, I, and K (Annex A), the stage 1 audit must be conducted on-site.

- **Audit Time Allocation:** If conducted off-site, the audit time for stage 1 should not exceed 20% of the total audit time. If conducted on-site, stage 1 may take up to 30% of the total audit duration.

9.2.3.1.4 Re-Auditing Parts of the Management System

If any part of the product safety management system has been audited during the stage 1 audit and is found to be fully implemented and in conformity with requirements, it may not need to be re-audited during stage 2. However, AHF must ensure that the audited parts continue to conform to certification requirements. The findings of the stage 1 audit must be documented in the stage 2 audit report.

9.2.3.1.6 Interval Between Audits

The interval between stage 1 and stage 2 audits should not exceed 6 months. If a longer interval is required, stage 1 should be repeated to ensure the client's system remains compliant.

9.2.3.2 Stage 2 Audit

The stage 2 audit will follow the requirements of clause 9.3.1.3 of ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015. This audit will focus on the actual implementation of the halal management system and will assess whether the system is effective in managing halal integrity and product safety.

9.2.4 Initial Halal Certification Audit Conclusions

AHF audit team shall analyze all information and audit evidence gathered during the stage 1

and stage 2 audits to review the audit findings and agree on the audit conclusions.

9.2.4.1 Conducting audits

9.2.4.2 Opening meeting

A formal opening meeting should be held with the management of the Client and the personnel responsible for the quality of production. The purpose of this meeting, which is conducted by the head of the audit team is to explain the objectives of the audit and the audit process. Opening meeting includes:

- a. Presentation of the members of the audit team, their roles.
- b. Confirmation of the scope of certification.
- c. Confirmation of the audit plan (including the type of audit, its scope, goals and criteria), any changes in the audit plan and any other arrangements with the Client, such as the date and time of the meeting, any intermediate meetings with the management of the Client;
- d. Setting formal methods of communication between the audit team and the Client.
- e. Confirmation that all resources and facilities required by the auditors are available.
- f. Confirmation of confidentiality issues.
- g. Definition of work safety procedures, emergency situations and security procedures for the audit team.
- h. Roles and functions of observers.
- i. Reporting method, including any assessment of audit results.
- j. Informing on the conditions under which the audit may be interrupted earlier than the established time.

- k. Confirmation that the audit team (including the head) is responsible for conducting the audit and monitoring the implementation of the audit plan.
- l. Information on the status of the results of previous audits/inspections.
- m. Informing on the methods and procedures to be used during the audit.
- n. Establishment of the language to be used during the audit.
- o. Confirmation that throughout the audit the Client will be informed about the progress of the audit.
- p. Providing opportunity to the Client to ask questions.

9.2.4.3 Communication during the audit

- a) During the audit, the audit team should periodically evaluate the progress of the audit and exchange information. The head of the audit team should distribute the work among the auditors and periodically inform the Client about the progress of the audit and areas of concern.
- b) In cases where the evidence gathered indicates that the audit objectives are unattainable or there is an immediate and significant risk (for example, a security risk), the head of the audit team should inform the Client and, if possible, the Certification Body, to determine the necessary actions. Such actions may include making changes to the audit plan, changing the objectives or scope of the audit, and terminating the audit. The head of the audit team must inform the Client and AHF about the actions taken.
- c) The head of the audit team should review with the Client the need to make changes to the audit scope that arose during the audit and inform AHF about the changes.

9.2.4.4 Collection and confirmation of information

- a) During the audit, information related to the objectives, scope and criteria of the audit should be collected by observation, collection of samples and their processing for them to become evidence.
- b) Information sampling methods include:
 - a. Interview
 - b. Supervision of the production process.
 - c. Revision of documentation and records.

- c) Product samples (if necessary) should be collected in accordance with international practices and submitted for analysis to laboratories accredited on ISO 17025 and conducting the tests necessary to establish compliance of products with Halal certification requirements and certification standards. When independent testing facilities are not available, the AHF shall ensure that the specified controls are in place at the supplier's testing facilities, and are managed in a manner which provides confidence in the results obtained and that records are available to justify the confidence.
- d) Inspections and tests on the Halal product shall be determined in accordance with the relevant requirements of the Halal product and the national and/or regional or international legal provisions.
- e) If certification of Halal products is based on testing/inspection of batches of the Halal product, the sampling is done in accordance with a defined sampling scheme utilizing statistically proven techniques with stated confidence levels.

9.2.4.5 Definition and documentation of audit results

- a) Audit results that summarize compliance and detail non-compliances should be identified, classified and documented to make an informed decision on Halal certification.
- b) Opportunities for improvement can be identified and documented (unless the selected certification standard prohibits this).
- c) The found non-conformity should be documented with respect to the relevant requirement and should contain complete information about the discovered non-conformity and evidence supporting it. All discrepancies found are discussed with the Client to ensure that the evidence collected is accurate and that the details of the discrepancy are clear to the Client. At the same time, the auditors do not comment or suggest the reasons for the inconsistencies and do not propose solutions to correct the inconsistencies found.
- d) The head of the audit team seeks to resolve any disputes and misunderstandings between the audit team and the Client regarding the audit results and the evidence gathered. If no solution is found, the details of the dispute/misunderstanding are documented.

9.2.4.6 Preparation of an audit report

Prior to the closing meeting, the audit team:

- a. Reviews the audit findings and all information collected during the audit regarding the objectives and criteria of the audit and classifies non-conformities.
- b. Comes to an agreement regarding the audit findings, taking into account the uncertainty inherent in the audit process.
- c. Comes to an agreement regarding the necessary follow-up actions.
- d. confirms the appropriateness of the audit program or identifies any modification required (e.g. scope, audit time or dates, surveillance frequency, competence).

9.2.4.7 Closing meeting

- a) A formal closing meeting, taking into account all participants, should be held with the management of the Client and the personnel responsible for the production quality. The purpose of this meeting, which is conducted by the head of the audit team, is to present the audit findings including an explanation of the inconsistencies found. During the closing meeting, the audit team and the Client come to an agreement regarding the time frame for correcting the discovered inconsistencies.
- b) The final meeting also includes:
 - i. Notification to the Client that the evidence collected during the audit is based on information samples, thus taking into account the element of uncertainty.
 - ii. Method and time frame for reporting, including classification of audit results.
 - iii. The process of processing non-conformities by AHF, including any consequences related to the certification status of the Client.
 - iv. The time frame for the Client's provision of a plan for the implementation of measures to eliminate non-conformities discovered during the audit.
 - v. Actions of the AHF after the audit.
- Information on the complaints and appeals process.

- The Client is given an opportunity for questions. Any diverging opinions regarding the audit findings or conclusions between the audit team and the Client are discussed and resolved where possible. Any diverging opinions that are not resolved are recorded and referred to AHF.
- c) If one or more non-conformances have arisen and if the Client expresses interest in continuing the Certification Process, the audit team provides information regarding the additional evaluation tasks needed to verify that non-conformances have been corrected.
- d) If the Client agrees to completion of the additional evaluation tasks, the production audit and/or document evaluation process shall be repeated to complete the additional evaluation tasks.
- e) The results of all evaluation activities shall be documented prior to review.

9.2.4.8 Audit report:

- a) AHF provides the Client with a written report on each audit. The report describes inconsistencies found and opportunities for improvement but does not provide advice on correcting inconsistencies. Ownership of the audit report is always maintained by AHF.
- b) If the product is in the food-chain operations, the report shall include references to issues relevant to FSMS (Food Safety Management System).
- c) The audit team leader is responsible for the preparation and content of the audit report. The audit report should contain correct, understandable and concise information about the audit in order to make an informed decision on Halal certification. The audit report contains the following information:
 - i) Details of the Certification Body.
 - ii) Details of the Client (name, address) and his representative (name, surname).
 - iii) Type of audit (certification, periodic).
 - iv) Audit criteria.
 - v) Audit objectives.
 - vi) Audit scope (certified products, audited production facilities, processes and audit time).
 - vii) Any deviations from the audit plan and their reasons.
 - viii) Any significant factors affecting the audit process.

- ix) The details of the audit team members, the head of the audit team and all accompanying persons.
 - x) Audit results, links to evidence and conclusions in accordance with the requirements of the selected standard.
 - xi) Any significant changes in the Client's activity and/or production of products that have occurred since the last audit (if applicable).
 - xii) Any unresolved issues/misunderstandings.
 - xiii) Confirmation of compliance of production with Halal requirements and the selected certification standard.
 - xiv) Conclusions regarding the selected certification area.
 - xv) Confirmation of the achievement of audit objectives.
 - xvi) Assessment of the effectiveness of measures to eliminate inconsistencies conducted by the Client (if applicable).
- d) The Client shall be informed if an additional full audit, an additional limited audit, or documented evidence (to be confirmed during future surveillance audits) will be needed to verify effective correction and corrective actions.

9.2.4.9 Analysis of reasons for non-conformance

AHF obliges its clients to analyze the reasons for the discovered non-conformances and to describe the measures to eliminate these non-conformances that will be taken within the agreed period.

In case of non-conformances found during the audit, the Client has to make a declaration, before renewal of application, that all the non-conformances detected in the audit were fully removed. In case of an unsuccessful Certification process, the new application is only accepted if the Client makes such a declaration. If the first Application for Certification is unsuccessful and the Client wishes to approach another certification body, then the Client shall make available detailed information regarding its first Application for Certification.

9.2.4.10 Effectiveness of Corrective Actions

- a) AHF analyzes the causes of non-conformances established by the Client and the planned measures to eliminate these non-conformances developed by the Client and determines whether they are acceptable. AHF must confirm the effectiveness of each corrective action. AHF also documents evidence obtained in support of correction of all conformances. The Client is informed of the results of the review and approval of measures to eliminate non-conformances. The Client is also informed about the need for an additional full or partial audit and/or provision of

documentation to confirm the measures taken to eliminate non-conformances and their effectiveness.

- b) After the application of all necessary changes, an official confirmation from the Client on taking measures to eliminate all inconsistencies and verification of the effectiveness of these measures by the AHF Audit Team, the documents are handed to the Head of Halal Certification Committee for the evaluation. Halal Certification Committee then makes recommendations for a certification decision based on the provided documents by a certification committee report.
- c) A member of Halal Certification Committee reviews all information and results related to the evaluation as well as the recommendation on the certification provided by the Halal Certification Department. The Halal Certification Committee decides on Halal certification based on all the documents and the results of the evaluation, its review and any other relevant information.

9.2.4.11 Review

AHF shall assign a Quality Assurance Manager / representative to review all information and results related to the evaluation. The review shall be carried out by person(s) who have not been involved in the evaluation process.