Food Safety Drives Growth in Kosher & Halal Foods
By Thomas R. Cutler

Most consumers believe that kosher and halal food products follow stricter quality standards than non-kosher products in the same category and since safety is a real priority for consumers, regulator practices from HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) to the Bioterrorism Act to lot traceability, food manufacturers are responding.

These quality practices are impacting the fortunes of manufacturers, suppliers and retailers. Reputations and brands are at risk when safety concerns and product recalls are front-page news. There are so many recent examples from spinach to pet food; the cost when quality standards are lacking is both financial and brand-killing.

Evan Garber, President of Escape Velocity Systems suggested, "Any technology solution must indicate whether a formula is Kosher or Halal. O2 is one of the few batch or recipe process manufacturing ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems which allow a user to indicate formulas that are Kosher or Halal. Whether Muslim in the case of Halal certification or a Rabbi in the case of Kosher certification, both will typically review formulations as well as historical production to verify that kosher products have been used. The ability to print and view all formulas and ingredients that have a designation (Kosher or Halal) is vital and must be true of historical production batches."

Other ERP functionality for these two designations include the requirement of "source of ingredients" because of the direct relationship to lot tracking of raw materials from procurement through production to finished goods. The requirement of "status of production equipment" relates to machines that only run kosher or halal items (given the cleaning specification of both food designations). Garber suggested, "Production planning (finite capacity) rules can be set that state that a section of formulas (kosher or halal, in this case) are only run on certain machines. If a planner tries to run on another line, the schedule board will prohibit it from moving. Production history can be updated for the machine indicating that a batch was actually run and received the required verification that batches were run on proper equipment. Indicators that the needed blessing has been made to a particular batch, item, or lot can be indicated."

Most food manufacturers which produce primary, semi-processed, and finished products in all principal food segments can apply kosher and halal food safety standards to their operations. These include meat, seafood, dairy, fruits and vegetables, as well as bread, beverages and meals. The combination of kosher, halal, and food safety certification programs create a simple and convenient way to integrate products and production management systems.

Food Allergies Drive Kosher and Halal Selections

Since food allergies and sensitivities affect one-third of all Americans, kosher and halal foods' clear labeling practice makes it easy for consumers to find dairy-free products as well as those that are meat free.

ISO 22000 and Quality

ISO 22000 is the newest international standard for food safety management systems and requires a rigorous ISO audit to confirm eligibility. The ISO 22000 Food Safety Management System emphasizes communication, systems management, prerequisite programs, and HACCP principles to assure complete food safety along the food chain. Manufacturing facilities must be structured to dynamically integrate quality and food safety management programs assuring the ability to produce high quality, safe products.

Given the extra food safety rigor applied to the production of Kosher and Halal foods, the consumer is responding and food manufacturers are considering the efficacy of expanding their marketing reach far beyond the religious rationale of both food practices; profitability rests in foods designated as Kosher and Halal.

Author Biography:

Thomas R. Cutler is the President & CEO of Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based TR Cutler, Inc., the largest manufacturing marketing firm worldwide – www.trcutlerinc.com. Cutler is the founder of the Manufacturing Media Consortium of twenty seven hundred journalists and editors writing about trends in manufacturing. Cutler is also the author of the Manufacturers' Public Relations and Media Guide. Cutler is a frequently published author within the manufacturing sector with more than 300 feature articles authored annually; he can be contacted at trcutler@trcutlerinc.com