

Tapping into the Global Halal Boom with Smarter Certification Models

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As global food markets grow more interconnected and more complex, manufacturers are under increasing pressure to meet diverse certification requirements that span food safety, sustainability, and religious compliance. Among these, halal certification is emerging as a powerful growth driver, with demand expanding well beyond traditional markets into regions like North America and Europe. In this evolving landscape, strategic collaborations are becoming essential to simplify compliance and accelerate market access.

In this interview, Sutida Ketudut, Managing Director APAC at NSF, discusses the organisation's recent collaboration with Circle H International and how it aims to streamline certification pathways for food brands worldwide. She shares insights on the rapidly expanding halal market, the growing need for integrated certification solutions, and how partnerships can help manufacturers navigate regulatory complexity while building consumer trust across global markets.

What was the primary strategic driver behind the collaboration between NSF and Circle H International, and how does this partnership strengthen your respective global certification ecosystems?

NSF's strategic collaboration with Circle H International was driven by an effort to simplify global market access for food brands, especially in today's complex certification environment. NSF is known for its technical expertise and credibility in food safety and relevant certifications, while Circle H is recognised for its authority and knowledge in halal practices. Both organisations have a global reach with expertise in key markets.

Together with Circle H, we are guiding brands toward the resources they need to meet consumer demands, addressing both religious and technical requirements, and helping brands to smoothly enter new markets.

With the global halal food market projected to reach \$3.27 trillion by 2028, which geographies do you see as the most immediate growth opportunities, and how will this collaboration help brands tap into them more effectively?

The Asia-Pacific region hosts the largest share of the world's Islamic population. We can expect to see continued growth in Southeast Asia (especially Malaysia and Indonesia), the Middle East, and India, as well as fast-growing Muslim-majority areas in Africa. We're also seeing an increase in demand in Western Europe and North America due to changing population trends. NSF is helping our client base interested in Halal certification quickly find a partner to support their brand's Halal certification needs.

To help brands reach these markets, this collaboration offers several benefits:

Direct pathways to halal certification; NSF refers clients to Circle H for halal certification, and vice versa, from Circle H clients to NSF and its comprehensive portfolio of food claims, including vegan, non-GMO, non-Ultra Processed Foods (non-UPF), organic and food safety certifications in over 110 countries.

Food companies today often pursue multiple certifications: halal, vegan, non-GMO, organic, and food safety. How will this direct referral pathway practically reduce time, cost, and compliance complexity for manufacturers?

Today, manufacturers face the challenge of managing multiple audits related to different certifications, such as halal, vegan, organic and food safety. To make this process easier, the referral of halal brands to NSF offers the companies a one-stop shop provider for the additional food claim requirements provided by NSF:

- Audit planning: This means fewer visits to facilities, which saves time and keeps operations running smoothly.
- Document sharing: Companies can use the same documents for NSF claim verification services, making it simpler to keep track of requirements and reducing paperwork.
- Standards clarity: By aligning how different standards are interpreted, manufacturers can avoid unnecessary work and confusion that can occur when requirements overlap.

The North American halal market is estimated at \$100 billion. How do you assess consumer awareness and retail readiness in this region, and what role will certification play in accelerating mainstream adoption?

Consumer awareness of halal products is increasing quickly in North America. As a result, retailers are beginning to allocate more space for halal products in their stores, with some stores even featuring a special halal section. Utilising a halal certification mark along with other product attribute claims raises consumer awareness of the overall product quality and alignment with their values. Having proper certification is crucial for the wider acceptance of halal products because it:

- Builds trust with retailers, showing them that the products meet their standards and have been officially verified by a third party.
- Helps brands satisfy the requirements of large store chains, which often require verified claims.

As regulatory scrutiny and consumer demand for transparency grow globally, how can integrated certification pathways enhance brand credibility and mitigate compliance risks for exporters?

The referral arrangement supports the expeditious delivery opportunity for brands to pursue food claims and halal certification on a parallel path with the two providers. Additionally, certification enhances a brand's reputation by showcasing its strong commitment to transparent and compliant practices.

Beyond referral collaboration, do you foresee deeper integration, such as joint audits, bundled certification models, or digital traceability solutions, to further streamline global market access for food companies?

Digital traceability plays a key role as it can ensure that data is current and trackable within a cloud-based system, further supporting risk management and recall readiness. With a more connected certification ecosystem, global standards can be met more efficiently while upholding trust and credibility. These are excellent principles to aspire to and as these technologies permit data sharing with advanced security, consumers are the ultimate beneficiaries.

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