

USDA-FSIS Petition 12-02 to Require Labeling for All Ritually Slaughtered Meat and Poultry

- Petitioner requests that all meat and poultry products that bear the mark of inspection AND are killed through ritual slaughter be required to be prominently labeled indicating the type of ritual slaughter performed and that the identity of ritually slaughtered products be maintained throughout all secondary processing. This should be done to ensure that consumers who do not wish to purchase ritually slaughtered meat and poultry products for whatever reason have the information necessary to avoid products slaughtered in such a manner.
- Current FSIS labeling regulations allow ritually slaughtered meat and poultry that bear the mark of inspection to enter interstate commerce without such ritual slaughter identification on the label which is false and misleading labeling. Allowing a product to be slaughtered in a religious ritual but not requiring the identity of that ritually slaughtered product to be maintained is misleading since the average American consumer assumes that the animal was slaughtered under conventional slaughter practices and not as part of a religious ritual. Furthermore, since some consumers wish to avoid such products, the lack of current labeling constitutes economic adulteration. In addition, allowing such ritually slaughtered products to enter into the school lunch program without proper labeling interferes with parental rights.
- The current labeling system discriminates against consumers who do not wish to consume ritually slaughtered meat and poultry. Some have complained that requiring labeling would infringe upon the rights of the consumer of ritually slaughtered product but that argument does not have merit as labeling does not interfere with access to ritually slaughtered product in any way. Labeling all ritually slaughtered products actually prevents any discrimination from occurring.
- FSIS has a statutory responsibility to stop transparently deceptive labeling practices and that meat and poultry products in today's marketplace are accurately labeled and do not mislead or otherwise misinform the consumer. Ensuring the proper labeling of federally inspected product is a core regulatory responsibility for FSIS. Consistent with this statutory obligation, FSIS has promulgated a number of regulations which codify basic labeling requirements and prohibit misleading practices. Under such circumstances, FSIS has a clear and compelling obligation to take effective action to put a stop to such ongoing consumer deception.
- FSIS recognizes that the substantive identity of the meat changes when it is ritually slaughtered by requiring product labeled halal or kosher processed actually be so prepared. The converse is also true in the respect that ALL product slaughtered in such a manner must maintain its identity as either halal or kosher slaughtered.
- Consumers have attempted to identify meat and poultry establishments that perform religious slaughter through FOIA requests. The responses to such requests have taken well over a year to be received and only included poultry establishments who had filed FSIS Form 5200-1. No data for red meat establishments was able to be provided by the Agency. Inquiries directly to meat and poultry processors have also produced false and misleading answers in an attempt to identify establishments that perform ritual slaughter. Therefore without a labeling requirement, it is impossible for consumers to be able to purchase non-ritually slaughtered meat and poultry with any certainty.
- The consumption of meat sacrificed to idols is prohibited for Christians. Because a prayer offering each animal as a sacrifice to Allah, the god of the Koran, is an integral part of halal slaughter, the consumption of halal meat by Christians is prohibited. In addition, Sikhs are prohibited from eating ritually slaughtered meat. Other consumers object to the lack of stunning or simply do not wish to further one religious ideology over another. Still others simply object to the lack of truth in labeling preventing consumers from making their own choices.