

Green Halal: Ethical and Sustainable Farming in Russia

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Abstract

This article examines the critical intersection of sustainability and halal ethics within Russia's rapidly growing meat and poultry sector, a region increasingly important for both domestic consumption and global export. Despite growing consumer confidence in halal as a sign of quality, a research gap exists regarding the specific mechanisms and challenges of integrating religiously-informed ethical mandates with contemporary environmental and social responsibility goals. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive research design, this study explores how halal principles influence production practices, animal welfare standards, supply-chain transparency, and broader sustainability efforts. Drawing on thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with diverse stakeholders including producers, religious authorities, regulators (e.g., Roskachestvo), and consumer advocates—this paper identifies key tensions and synergies between the two frameworks. Key findings indicate that while halal certification inherently promotes certain aspects of ethical practice (e.g., animal welfare at slaughter, hygiene), challenges remain in standardizing these principles across the entire supply chain and aligning them with broader environmental metrics (e.g., carbon emissions, waste reduction). The study highlights specific areas where a lack of standardized certification procedures and potential "haram washing" can lead to consumer distrust. It concludes with policy recommendations and practical strategies to better align halal certification with environmental stewardship, enhanced animal welfare, and long-term market competitiveness in the Russian context.

Keywords: Halal ethics, sustainability, meat industry, poultry, Russia, animal welfare, certification, supply chain, thematic analysis, consumer trust.

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Introduction

The conceptualization of Halal ethics extends far beyond a minimalist checklist of permissible ingredients (*halal*) and forbidden items (*haram*); it fundamentally encompasses a holistic framework of *tayyib* (wholesome, ethical, and pure) principles (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004; Farouk et al., 2014). This ethical system mandates broader moral imperatives related to animal welfare (the principle of *ihsan*, or benevolence), stringent hygiene standards, honesty in trade practices, and the overall well-being of the community and the environment.

Sustainability, within the highly scrutinized context of the modern meat and poultry sector, is conventionally understood through the triple bottom line: encompassing environmental impacts (e.g., land use efficiency, water consumption rates, greenhouse gas emissions), social aspects (e.g., fair labor practices, community health and safety), and economic resilience (e.g., supply-chain integrity, market access, and long-term viability).

The core of this inquiry lies at the intersection of these two paradigms. There are clear, natural overlaps: where halal ethics emphasize humane treatment, respect for creation (*khalifa* responsibility), and supply chain purity, these align directly with sustainability objectives related to animal welfare outcomes and supply chain transparency. The text identifies that practical tensions inevitably emerge. These friction points are often centered around the realities of industrial production scale, the complexities and standardization of current certification processes, and the prevailing economic constraints faced by producers in the Russian market. This paper seeks to unpack these synergies and tensions qualitatively.

Methodology

The global dialogue surrounding ethical consumption has intensified, bringing critical scrutiny to supply chains once considered opaque. Within this unfolding narrative, two powerful frameworks are converging in unexpected geographies: the global mandate for sustainability and the deeply held principles of Halal ethics. This study turns its focus toward the Russian Federation—a crucial, yet under-explored, nexus of agricultural ambition and diverse religious observance. Halal ethics, far from being a mere checklist of dietary permissions, represents a profound moral architecture. It is an encompassing philosophy rooted in *tayyib* (wholesome and pure) principles, demanding respect for all creation (*ihsan*) and strict adherence to purity, benevolence, and honesty in trade (Riaz & Chaudry, 2004; Farouk et al., 2014). This holistic view inherently emphasizes animal welfare, stringent hygiene standards, and community well-being values that resonate with modern consumers globally.

Simultaneously, the sustainability imperative is reshaping the modern meat and poultry sector. Defined by the interconnected environmental (e.g., land use,

carbon footprint), social (e.g., labor practices, community health), and economic (supply-chain integrity) challenges, sustainability demands holistic integration. The point of convergence is clear: where halal ethics mandate humane treatment and ethical sourcing, there is a natural, values-based overlap with contemporary sustainability objectives.

Yet, this convergence is not seamless. The crucial friction points in the Russian context often arise from the stark realities of industrial production scales versus craft-based ethical ideals, the standardization challenges of nascent certification processes, and the prevailing economic constraints faced by producers navigating complex domestic and international markets. This article seeks to qualitatively unpack these synergies and tensions, offering a nuanced understanding of how these two powerful ethical systems can—or cannot—coexist within the dynamics of Russia’s agricultural landscape.

Key Findings and Thematic Analysis

The qualitative assessment yielded five interconnected themes that illuminate the complex interaction between faith-based ethics and practical sustainability challenges within the Russian meat and poultry sectors.

1. Halal as a Driver of Welfare-Conscious Practices

A significant finding from the expert interviews is that halal principles inherently serve as a powerful *driver* for improved ethical standards within production facilities. Many religious authorities and certification bodies emphasized that the core tenets of halal advocate for humane slaughter (*dhabihah*), minimal animal suffering, and pristine sanitary practices (Farouk et al., 2014; FAO & WHO, 2011).

This ethical framing is not just theoretical; it operationalizes tangible outcomes. It encourages slaughterhouses to adopt higher hygiene standards, invest in better staff training focused on compassionate animal handling, and maintain a cleaner overall environment—outcomes that simultaneously improve animal welfare, enhance workplace safety, and mitigate critical food-safety risks. The synergy here is evident and operational.

2. Certification Variability and the Fragility of Consumer Trust

A recurring and significant governance challenge is the pervasive heterogeneity among halal certification providers (Tieman, 2011; Ziegler & Bruns, 2021). The lack of a single, unified state or religious standard leads to a fragmented landscape.

Differences in interpretive approaches to Islamic law, auditing rigor, and basic transparency can swiftly erode consumer trust and complicate industry-wide efforts to integrate sustainability standards uniformly across producers. The analysis highlights a clear dichotomy: where certification processes are rigorous, transparent, and verifiable, they become a valuable asset for market differentiation. Conversely, where the process is opaque—vulnerable to perceptions of halal washing it actively hinders market access and discourages meaningful sustainable investments.

3. The Tension Between Mass Production and Ethical Standards

The formidable industrialization of poultry and meat production in Russia has resulted in massive, vertically integrated operations optimized primarily for cost reduction and throughput efficiency (Lever et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020).

This efficiency-first model often clashes directly with certain halal ethical preferences, such as the mandate for careful, individual animal handling and specific limits on line-slaughter speeds. Producers candidly reported navigating difficult trade-offs: maintaining hyper-efficient production metrics frequently compromises the ability to meet certain nuanced, halal-prescribed welfare practices, particularly within high-volume, export-oriented facilities designed for maximum output.

4. Environmental Impacts: The Overlooked Dimension in Halal Discourse

A conspicuous gap identified by stakeholders is that the traditional purview of halal certification historically centers almost exclusively on ritual purity (*halal*) and sanitary aspects (*tayyib*), with broader environmental sustainability receiving limited, if any, formal attention (FAO, 2019; Tieman, 2011).

This gap, however, presents a significant strategic opportunity. Integrating robust environmental criteria—such as resource efficiency metrics (water/energy use), advanced waste management protocols, and comprehensive antibiotic stewardship programs directly into halal frameworks could bridge this divide. Such an alignment would create a more holistic, robust standard that satisfies both deeply held faith-based ethics and urgent global sustainability goals.

5. Market Incentives and the Rise of the Conscious Consumer

The market analysis reveals a powerful emerging trend: consumers who actively prioritize halal certification are increasingly likely to also care deeply about general sustainability and verifiable animal welfare practices. Producers who proactively communicate both rigorous halal compliance and demonstrable environmental responsibility are strategically better positioned to capture premium market segments—appealing strongly to affluent domestic urban Muslims and lucrative international export markets. The challenge remains, however, that many small and medium producers lack the necessary capital resources to invest in the costly upgrades required for these dual certifications and advanced sustainability measures.

Qualitative Discussion

From a qualitative governance perspective, halal ethics operate less like a traditional state-enforced regulatory body and more as a powerful *normative framework*. This framework shapes producer behavior not primarily through coercive legal enforcement, but through inherent moral authority and the promise of consumer trust (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). This distinction is critical in the decentralized Russian context, where a unified federal standard is absent.

The relationship between this faith-based ethical framework and the secular mandate of sustainability in Russia's meat and poultry sector is revealed to be simultaneously promising and critically underdeveloped. Halal principles provide a

vital moral vocabulary that naturally supports humane animal treatment (*ihsan*) and stringent hygiene—foundational building blocks upon which a broader, robust sustainability agenda can be built.

Yet, the study's findings indicate that practical constraints significantly limit the seamless translation of abstract ethical principles into concrete environmental stewardship outcomes. The friction points identified—including prohibitive costs, chronic certification fragmentation, and intense production pressures—represent governance challenges that require targeted intervention.

Based on our thematic analysis, several key leverage points emerge as critical for future policy and practice:

Strategic Leverage Points for Alignment

- **Certification Harmonization:** The current fragmented landscape is the primary barrier to progress. Establishing clearer, widely accepted halal certification benchmarks that *explicitly* incorporate verifiable animal welfare and environmental criteria would drastically reduce market confusion and systematically raise industry standards nationwide. This could be facilitated through public-private partnerships involving entities like Roskachestvo.
- **Capacity-Building and Knowledge Transfer:** To avoid excluding smaller market participants, targeted training programs for producers on implementing low-cost, high-impact sustainability measures (e.g., energy efficiency, strategic waste reduction, responsible antibiotic use) are essential.
- **Structured Stakeholder Dialogue:** The creation of formal platforms that convene certification bodies, influential religious leaders (*muftis*), producers, and civil society representatives can align diverse interpretations of Islamic law with modern sustainability science, forging consensus on best practices.
- **Transparent Market Signalling:** The development of integrated labels and transparent documentation that combine authentic halal compliance with robust sustainability metrics empowers the "conscious consumer." This clear signalling mechanism helps consumers make informed choices and actively rewards responsible producers in the marketplace, driving economic incentives for ethical behavior.

Recommendations

The findings of this qualitative assessment underscore that achieving synergy between halal ethics and sustainability in Russia's meat and poultry industry requires deliberate, multi-pronged strategic intervention. These recommendations are designed not merely as a checklist but as a roadmap for stakeholders seeking to foster a more resilient, ethical, and competitive sector.

A Roadmap for Ethical Alignment and Sustainable Growth

- **Integrate Environmental Criteria into Halal Standards: The Next Generation of Certification**
We urge certification bodies to move beyond traditional boundaries. Pilot programs should be established for an expanded *tayyib* (wholesome) standard that integrates essential environmental performance indicators—specifically focusing on water use efficiency, sophisticated waste management protocols, and comprehensive antibiotic stewardship.
- **Standardize and Publicize Certification Procedures: Building Unquestionable Transparency**
To combat market fragmentation and eliminate "halalwashing," the industry needs unity. We recommend the development and adoption of common minimum audit protocols across Russia. This must be coupled with public-facing, easily accessible registries of accredited halal certifiers to significantly improve transparency and solidify consumer confidence.
- **Support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): Ensuring Inclusive Growth**
Sustainability and ethics should not be luxuries reserved for large corporations. Policymakers should introduce targeted mechanisms—such as technical assistance programs, microgrants, or low-interest loans—specifically designed to empower SMEs to implement cleaner technologies and obtain rigorous, recognized halal certification.
- **Promote Advanced Animal Welfare Training: Operationalizing *Ihsan***
The ethical treatment of animals (*ihsan*) is central to both frameworks. Funding should be directed toward developing and implementing mandatory training modules for all farm and abattoir workers. This training must focus on humane handling practices and stress reduction techniques that are fully compatible with established halal slaughter requirements.
- **Encourage Multi-Stakeholder Councils: Co-Designing the Future Governance**
Governance in this complex arena requires collaboration. We advocate for the creation of formal, regional councils that bridge traditionally separate silos, bringing together muftis (Islamic scholars), public-health officials, environmental experts, and industry representatives to collaboratively co-design context-appropriate guidelines that reflect both ethical mandates and scientific realities.
- **Consumer Education Campaigns: Cultivating Conscious Consumption**
The power of the market lies in informed consumer choice. Collaborative campaigns, leveraging the moral authority of religious institutions and community organizations, can effectively raise awareness about the inherent interconnectedness of rigorous halal practices and verifiable sustainability outcomes, thereby driving market demand for better standards.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the convergence of halal ethics and sustainability within Russia's meat and poultry industry constitutes a multidimensional governance challenge, yet simultaneously offers a strategic opportunity for ethical and market-oriented transformation. Through an interpretivist qualitative assessment of stakeholder perspectives, the findings reveal that halal principles—particularly those related to hygiene, animal welfare, and moral accountability—already function as a normative infrastructure that aligns closely with internationally recognized sustainability benchmarks.

At a qualitative level, halal ethics provide a culturally embedded and socially legitimate entry point for advancing sustainability discourse in Russia's agri-food sector (FAO, 2019; World Bank, 2020). Stakeholder narratives indicate that consumer trust, religious legitimacy, and ethical compliance are deeply interlinked. However, persistent governance gaps—most notably fragmented certification systems, the dominance of industrial-scale production, and the historical exclusion of environmental indicators from halal standards—undermine this potential. These gaps generate a structural tension between ethical commitments and economic efficiency, compelling producers to prioritize cost reduction over long-term ethical and ecological value, thereby risking reputational erosion and market volatility (Tieman, 2011; Ziegler & Bruns, 2021).

From a quantitative and policy-oriented perspective, the integration of environmental metrics into halal certification frameworks (via the *tayyib* principle) presents tangible performance benefits. Existing international evidence suggests that harmonized certification systems can reduce compliance duplication costs by 15–30%, while sustainability-oriented production models improve resource efficiency and waste reduction across livestock supply chains. For Russia's expanding halal export market particularly toward Muslim-majority regions—such reforms could translate into measurable gains in export competitiveness, regulatory clarity, and consumer confidence.

The core contribution of this study lies in identifying actionable leverage points that transcend the perceived trade-off between ethics and efficiency. Harmonizing halal certification standards, institutionalizing environmental stewardship within religious mandates, and fostering structured multi-stakeholder dialogue can collectively enhance governance coherence. Capacity-building initiatives targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are especially critical, as they enable broader compliance, technological adoption, and equitable market participation aligning faith-based moral imperatives with global sustainability goals is neither symbolic nor aspirational; it is a strategic and achievable pathway. With targeted regulatory reform, institutional coordination, and investment, halal-compliant meat and poultry production in Russia can evolve into a scalable model of ethically grounded, environmentally responsible food systems—

delivering improved animal welfare, reduced ecological footprints, and sustained long-term market advantage.

Conference and Policy Implications

Conference Paper Relevance

This paper offers a timely and nuanced contribution to international conferences specializing in political economy, food governance, and Islamic ethics. By providing a case-based qualitative assessment of Russia—a major agricultural power and a complex non-Muslim-majority state—the research fills a critical gap in our understanding of how religious norms and secular sustainability agendas negotiate space.

The study's deep dive into institutional interpretation, the politics of certification, and the evolution of ethical discourse makes it particularly relevant for qualitative panels exploring the "moral turn" in global economies. It challenges the traditional view of regulation as a purely state-driven mechanism, instead presenting a compelling narrative of how faith-based norms function as a de facto regulatory force in emerging markets.

Policy Implications: Beyond the Checklist

From a policy perspective, this research moves beyond a "checklist" approach to halal, advocating for a holistic governance model that integrates the Islamic concept of *Tayyib* (wholesomeness) with modern environmental standards. The implications for policymakers in Russia and beyond are clear:

- **Sovereign Standards and Export Growth:** To remain competitive in the global \$2 trillion halal market, Russian regulators—such as the Ministry of Agriculture—must move toward a harmonized national standard that mirrors international best practices while respecting local religious autonomy.
- **The "Green Halal" Advantage:** By incentivizing "Green Halal" initiatives, the state can simultaneously meet its carbon reduction targets and enhance the reputation of its agricultural exports as both ethically and environmentally superior.
- **Empowering the Grassroots:** Policies should prioritize the inclusion of small and medium-sized producers (SMEs) through targeted technical assistance, ensuring that the transition to a sustainable halal economy is socially inclusive and economically resilient.

In conclusion, this article serves as a strategic bridge, demonstrating that the alignment of faith-based ethics and environmental stewardship is not merely a theoretical possibility, but a practical necessity for the future of global food security and ethical commerce.

Policy Brief: A Strategic Vision for Ethical Food Governance

For policymakers, industry regulators, and the architects of Russia's food future, the findings of this assessment translate into a clear, actionable mandate. Beyond the technicalities of slaughter, we propose a shift toward a Holistic Ethical

Economy. The following pillars represent a roadmap for ministries of agriculture and halal councils seeking to modernize the sector through culturally resonant, high-integrity reforms.

1. Unified Standards for a Global Market

The current "patchwork" of halal certification in Russia is more than just a bureaucratic hurdle—it is an economic liability. To protect the integrity of the "Made in Russia" brand, we recommend the **Harmonization of Halal Standards**. By establishing a single, transparent audit protocol, the state can eliminate halal washing and ensure that Russian meat and poultry meet the most rigorous global expectations for quality and transparency.

2. From "Permissible" to "Wholesome" Integrating the *Tayyib* Framework

The true potential of halal ethics lies in the concept of *Tayyib*—the intersection of ritual purity and holistic goodness. We urge regulatory bodies to integrate environmental indicators directly into faith-based governance. This means expanding certification to include measurable milestones in water stewardship, waste reduction, and antibiotic-free production. In doing so, Russia can position its halal sector as a global leader in "Green Halal" production.

3. Democratizing Sustainability: Empowering the SME Backbone

Sustainability must not become a luxury reserved for the industrial giants. A resilient food system depends on the vitality of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Policy interventions should focus on inclusive capacity-building, providing smaller producers with the technical training and micro-financing needed to adopt ethical technologies. This ensures that the transition to a sustainable economy is both socially equitable and economically diverse.

4. Building Culturally Legitimate Reforms

Policy is most effective when it resonates with the values of the people it governs. The qualitative insights in this study demonstrate that cultural legitimacy is the key to sustainability. By engaging religious authorities and community leaders as partners in reform, food safety authorities can foster a culture of compliance that is driven by moral conviction rather than just coercive regulation.

Why This Matters for 2025 and Beyond

As global markets increasingly demand "ESG-plus" (Environmental, Social, Governance, and Ethics) transparency, Russia stands at a crossroads. These reforms offer more than just a path to compliance; they offer a path to Market Leadership. By aligning the ancient wisdom of halal ethics with the urgent needs of modern sustainability, Russia can build a meat and poultry industry that is as ecologically responsible as it is culturally profound.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on halal ethics and sustainability in Russia's meat and poultry sector should adopt an integrated empirical and comparative approach. Firstly, empirical lifecycle assessments comparing halal-certified and conventional

meat production systems can generate evidence on differences in environmental impacts such as water use, emissions, and resource efficiency. Secondly, consumer willingness-to-pay studies for combined halal-plus-sustainability labels would help assess market incentives and determine whether ethical and environmental signaling translates into economic value for producers. Thirdly, comparative case studies of regional halal certification models within Russia can illuminate how varying governance structures and certification practices influence sustainability performance. Collectively, these approaches would strengthen the empirical foundation of halal sustainability research by linking production impacts, consumer behavior, and institutional variation within a unified analytical framework.

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