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Organizational Stance on Controlled Atmospheric Stunning (CAS) / Gas Stunning

Controlled Atmospheric Stunning (CAS), commonly known as gas stunning is a rather new technique employed in Canada at the pre-slaughter phase of poultry slaughter. The Halal Monitoring Authority (HMA) of the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians (CCMT) has thoroughly investigated the procedure for its usage in the slaughter of halal poultry. The concern that has been expressed by members of the community is that due to the irreversible nature of this stun, the birds subjected to this procedure may die before slaughter. It should be noted that ensuring that the stun is reversible is not a fiqh premise but more of a precautionary measure to ensure life in the bird at the time of slaughter. More importantly, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) requires that birds that have died prior to the stunning-slaughter steps are detected and removed either before or after gas stunning and do not enter the food chain thus compromising food safety.¹

In Islamic Law, all animals that enter a terminal state are permissible for consumption provided they are alive at the time of slaughter.² For animals that are additionally immobile while terminal, one of two factors is required to ascertain life: (1) non death related movements (2) blood flow at the time of slaughter that resembles the flow of blood of a regular animal when slaughtered.³

Since the prime objective of CAS is to render the bird insensible by eliminating all movement, the HMA has stipulated that both the Islamic and Industry standards of ascertaining life are found in the bird at the time of slaughter for it to be fit for halal consumption. The criterion is as follows:

1. The bird is flaccid
2. Its body temperature is the same as a pre-stunned bird
3. It has an active pulse and heartbeat that is observable on a pulse oximeter and ECG
4. Its blood flows and is thoroughly drained as it would from a non-stunned bird

¹ <https://inspection.canada.ca/food-guidance-by-commodity/meat-products-and-food-animals/guidelines-for-stunning-techniques/eng/1538160892409/1538160892704#a18>

² Ka' b ibn Mālik ḥ reported that he had a flock of sheep that would graze at Sal'. A slave girl of ours saw a sheep from our flock dying, so she broke a stone and slaughtered it with it. Ka' b ḥ told his family, "Do not eat it until I ask Allāh's Messenger ḡ or send someone to ask him." He then either asked the Prophet ḡ about this or sent someone to do so. The Prophet ḡ instructed them to eat it. (Ṣaḥīḥ al- Bukhārī 2304)

³ Radd al-Mukhtār 6:308



It should be noted that dead birds retain their blood at the time of slaughter thus classifying them as red or dark birds and are easily detectable.

Till date, the HMA has approved of two facilities for their CAS operations:

1. Maple Leaf Inc. Edmonton AB Est. 7F where the line speed is 110 birds a minute, the CAS is set on 55% at exit, and the minimum time from CAS to slaughter is 0:42 min. while the maximum time is 1:12 min.
2. Maple Leaf Inc. London ON Est. 901 where the line speed is 225 birds a minute, the CAS is set on 61% at exit, and the minimum time from CAS to slaughter is 0:35 min. while the maximum time is 1:24 min.

Declaring something as halal or haram is a fiqh issue, not a scientific one. Although scientific data may be considered when investigating certain matters, it will never serve as the foundation for any Islamic ruling. Islamic rulings are derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the principles and guidance deduced from them. Hence, the HMA, being one of the largest body of scholars serving in the field of halal, have engaged other scholarly bodies and institutions on the matter of CAS. It has shared its research with them and has arranged for them to view the certified operations firsthand. As a result, their ruling on the matter is based on their insight of fiqh and independent of any influence from the HMA. One such scholar that has viewed both the data and the operation is the world-renowned Mufti Ateeq Ahmad Bastawi from the Islamic Fiqh Academy India. He has written:

"Today, April 2nd, 2024, corresponding with the 23rd of the blessed month of Ramadan, 1445 during my visit to Canada, I had the opportunity to visit Maple Leaf London, Canada with Moulana Saeed Faizi (may his honour be increased) and Moulana Mohammed Omar Subedar. There, a detailed observation was made on how the chickens were being slaughtered. Upon the live birds being rendered unconscious through CAS, they were slaughtered with a knife [manually] with bismillah recited [upon them]. There is satisfaction [in me] that the birds are alive at the time of slaughter. We calmly watched the entire process and had the opportunity to understand it. With Allah's praise, I affirm that at the time of slaughter, the birds are alive at the aforementioned abattoir. Muslim slaughterers slaughter them reciting bismillah. According to my detailed observation, there is no doubt in the halal status of these birds."

The HMA is aware of certain members of the business community that have exerted their efforts to cause commotion and aversion towards the organization on certain online platforms and in person for motives that are better known to them. We simply pray for their guidance and ask the readers to do the same.

For the ease of the community, the HMA has prepared a report detailing all the different dimensions for its consideration of approving CAS titled "Navigating the Tide of CAS in Muslim Minority Communities." The report reveals the industry realities of Canada, the various forms of tests the HMA has conducted



both independently and in conjunction with a certified Vet, the peer review of avian experts such as the Poultry Health Services and the procedures it has adopted to ensure compliance with its halal criterion. Upon viewing three sets of ECG tests Dr. Ben Schlegel and Dr. Tom Inglis from Poultry Health Services have written:

“These reports demonstrate that heartbeats are routinely present in birds that have been exposed to controlled atmosphere stunning at these facilities, which is considered a sign of life. The birds are irreversibly stunned but physiologically maintain heart activity and blood pressure consistent with and comparable to other approved forms of stunning (electrical low voltage, high amperage and low atmospheric pressure).

It should be noted that even with high voltage, low amperage stunning which induce cardiac arrest, the birds are considered, insensible but alive at the time of bleeding. Unlike the event of simultaneous cardiac and brain interruption through electrical stunning, in CO2 stunning the brain activity will cease prior to the cardiac function. In addition to the findings of this report, it is worth noting that any bird which was dead at the time of cutting would not have adequate blood pressure to bleed out and would be removed from the line as a DOA carcass (dark bird).”

In conclusion, the CAS operations that the HMA has certified till date are in complete compliance with the fiqh rulings of halal. The HMA does not declare that all CAS operations are halal compliant. Like electric water bath stun, each operation must be regulated prior to being accepted as halal. The HMA is a department of the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians, a federally registered non-for-profit organization striving for the welfare of the Muslim community.

Board of Directors
Halal Monitoring Authority

