

# UNITEHERE!

## Advisory: Halal compliance at Flying Food Group LAX

Airline passengers, particularly on long-haul flights, rely on airlines to provide food that meets their dietary requirements. Many carriers based in Islamic countries take this responsibility a step further, assuring passengers that only halal food is served on board their planes.

The rapid growth of three Middle Eastern airlines- Emirates, Etihad and Qatar- has increased the demand for halal catering services at US airports. Among the companies vying for this business, one, Flying Food Group, markets itself as a specialist in “multi-ethnic” cuisines for international flights (a category into which it places “Halal” along with “Italian,” “Chinese,” and “German”).

As of the final quarter of 2014, Flying Food’s Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Miami and Dallas kitchens each prepared food for at least one all-halal airline. Unfortunately, a number of disturbing violations of halal guidelines have occurred in the Flying Food Group catering kitchen that services Etihad flights out of Los Angeles:

- Deep fried items prepared for halal flights, including French fries and kibbeh, were cooked in fryers that were used for general food preparation. As a result, some halal items ended up being fried in oil that was used for pork products.
- Halal and non-halal service items were comingled during preparation and washing, which was sometimes done without soap or proper sanitizing processes.
- Non-halal food was prepared, stored and transported in areas and with equipment designated for halal use.

We believe that these violations of halal may have resulted from working conditions and operational challenges within Flying Food Group. Surveys of workers in Flying Food kitchens in Seattle and Los Angeles have raised concerns about the ability of some Flying Food employees to perform their jobs in a way that allows them to consistently protect themselves and the passengers they serve.

In June 2014, Etihad Airlines selected Flying Food to service its LAX to Abu Dhabi route- a 16-hour daily flight that can accommodate more than 85,000 passengers per year. As of May 2015, though Flying Food has been catering the Etihad flights for more than 11 months, the dedicated halal kitchen intended to be used for this client was still not functional and halal products were being baked and fried in the main hot kitchen using equipment also used to prepare pork and non-halal meats.

Workers at the Imperial Avenue kitchen, which services the Etihad flights, have reported working under conditions that were incompatible with halal compliance protocols. Workers describe long hours working in crowded conditions under intense time pressure, and FDA inspections of the facility from 2011, 2013 and 2015 reported that “all reasonable precautions [were] not taken to ensure that production procedures do not contribute to contamination,” including in the maintenance of washing equipment, handling of raw and cooked foods, and upkeep of facilities.

While Flying Food has policies and training programs establishing rules for halal production, workers were unable to reconcile their actual working conditions with these stated protocols. Without the time, personnel, or functioning equipment to properly and safely do their jobs, some Flying Food employees were unable to ensure that food being served to passengers as “halal” had not come into contact with *haram* or *mushbooh* products.