

Q: What is the purpose of food additives and how widely are they used?

Substances that are added to food products and becomes part of it are called food additives.

Some three thousand substances are deliberately added to food and drinks to increase their desirability. Another ten thousand compounds and combinations of these can be used during processing, packaging and storing of these products.

Additives are used for one or more of the following purposes:

1. Maintaining or improving the nutritional value lost

If it is insufficient or needs fortifying with vitamins and minerals.

2. To maintain freshness

To prevent food from getting spoiled by microbial action or oxidation which causes changes in colour and flavour, e.g. breads, mayonnaise, cheese, etc. To prevent rancidity in foods such as baked goods, cereals, snacks, etc.

3. To make foods more appealing

By adding colours using any of the thirty three available colours or a myriad combination of these or by giving flavour to foods with over one thousand seven hundred synthetic substances and adding sweetness.

4. To assist in preparation and processing.

To facilitate the desired effect by giving body and texture to foods, evenly distributing particles of one liquid into another, control acidity and alkalinity, affect baking results, retain moisture and prevent caking or lumping.

With the incredible advances in food science and technology, widespread use of additives, globalisation of competition in supply and demand, the Halaal assurance and well-intentioned words of a supplier cannot be relied on. Bear in mind that they themselves do not control every ingredient in the process nor do they possess adequate knowledge of the raw materials and processes used in the manufacture of these ingredients.

This burden then falls squarely onto the shoulders of Halaal regulators who have to possess in-depth and up-to-date knowledge. All their resources should be ploughed into the Halaal regulatory service and officials must have the highest levels of commitment. Halaal regulation should be the organisation's only concern and vocation.

Your constructive comments, criticism and feedback is truly appreciated

www.sanha.org.za