

'Traces of pork' found in prison Halal pies and pasties

FSA said the incident involved traces of pork

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One of the Prison Service's meat suppliers was suspended last night after it was found Halal pies and pasties were contaminated with pork.

Ministers described the contamination as "unacceptable" and ordered an immediate investigation. The pies and pasties came from a supplier which had certification that supposedly assured buyers the meat was Halal.

According to Islamic law, special measures must be taken in animal slaughter and meat preparation, including cutting the animal's throat cleanly and dedicating it to Allah. Pork is proscribed, so the discovery that the contamination came from pigs will amplify the anger and hurt caused.

Juliet Lyon, director of the Prison Reform Trust, welcomed the Ministry of Justice's apology and investigation and said: "This is not a matter of dietary preference but of Islamic law. This lapse will have offended and distressed high numbers of Muslim prisoners and their families; so apologising, suspending the supplier and investigating the incident are the right steps for the Ministry of Justice to take."

Jeremy Wright, the Justice minister, said: "This is an unacceptable situation and one which we regret greatly. Clearly this must be distressing for those affected and they can be reassured we are doing everything we can to resolve the situation. The Prison Service is investigating this as a matter of urgency."

David Heath, Food and Farming minister, said: "People have a right to expect that the food they are eating is correctly described.

"I have made it clear that I want an urgent meeting with major retailers and suppliers first thing next week to get to the bottom of this."

All prisons have been informed but the name and location of the supplier were not revealed. The Food Standards Agency confirmed the contamination came from pork and an inquiry has begun to see if the contaminated food has been distributed more widely.

A spokeswoman said: "We have called an urgent meeting of the big retailers and suppliers on Monday to ensure everyone is fully aware of their responsibilities.

"It is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure the food they sell contains what it says on the label. We are considering, with relevant local authorities whether legal action is appropriate following the investigation."