

## **Implementation of Nutrition Programs and Challenges in Ensuring the Halal Status of Food Products: Halal Study of MBG Kitchens in Pekalongan Regency**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the compliance of the Halal Product Assurance System (SJPH) in the Free Nutritious Meal Kitchen (MBG) in Pekalongan Regency. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with SPPG officers and kitchen managers, supported by document analysis of SJPH implementation. The findings show that the MBG kitchens have generally applied halal procedures; however, not all SPPG members involved in the program hold halal supervisor certification as mandated by BPJPH, resulting in gaps in monitoring and verification. This study contributes by highlighting the weak compliance of SPPG in performing their mandated responsibilities, providing an empirical basis for strengthening halal governance in MBG kitchens within Pekalongan Regency.

**Keywords:** MBG Kitchen, SPPG, Halal Assurance System, Halal Product Assurance System.

### **Introduction**

Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) is one of the government's policies and initiatives that has attracted public attention in Indonesia, especially among stakeholders and policymakers. Its aim is to provide healthy and nutritious meals for school children (elementary to high school). This idea is rooted in the fundamental belief that every citizen, especially children, has the right to food that is not only filling, but also healthy and nutritious. The implementation of this program is not merely a matter of food logistics, but rather a strategic investment in the development of quality human resources in the future, towards a Golden Indonesia. This program was initially initiated by President Prabowo Subianto with the 2025 global nutrition targets set by international organizations such as *the World Health Organization (WHO)* and *the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, which aim to overcome nutritional problems that remain a major obstacle to human resource development. This global nutrition target includes reducing stunting, anemia, low birth weight, overweight, increasing exclusive breastfeeding, and reducing wasting. The WHO views free

nutritious meals as an important part of a promotive and preventive approach in the public health system.

The implementation of this program in various regions still faces significant challenges. There has been widespread national news coverage of the large number of children who have been poisoned by MBG, as well as reports showing discrepancies between the food served and the established nutritional standards, uneven portions, and types of food that are not appropriate for the needs of school-age children. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the program in achieving its objectives in the field. Although the implementation of MBG in various regions has shown positive impacts, such as increased enthusiasm for learning and student attendance at school, the effectiveness of this program cannot be measured solely by the distribution of food. The success of the MBG can only be achieved if the food served truly pays attention to nutritional balance in accordance with the Nutrient Adequacy Rate (AKG) standards set by the Ministry of Health, which are halal and good. The indicators of the success of the MBG implementation can be seen from two sides, namely the process and the results. From the process side, it must be ensured that the food prepared is halal and good, as well as nutritionally balanced and safe.

The recent cases of mass poisoning that have occurred in various regions show that food safety is still a weak point in implementation. In addition to being halal, good, and pure, the food served must also be good in various aspects, starting from the raw materials, the method of cooking/processing the food, storage, presentation/packaging, and distribution, so that halal and good food can provide comfort, security, safety, and certainty.

Food poisoning that occurs in some schools can also occur due to the selection of raw materials, which, if not selected properly, can cause harm or be unhealthy for consumption. Food processing that is not done optimally can also cause harm to the food, even turning it into poison and posing a danger. Serving cooked food can also cause the food to lose its nutritional content due to contamination with materials or tools containing harmful bacteria, whether the food is cooked or not. Therefore, this research is titled "Implementation of Nutrition Programs and Challenges in Ensuring the Halal Status of Food Products (Free Nutritious Kitchen in Pekalongan Regency) / Halal Study of MBG Kitchens in Pekalongan Regency."

The MBG Program in Pekalongan Regency is a manifestation of the concern of the Pekalongan Regency government, which can have a major impact on the health and prosperity of students in Pekalongan Regency, thereby realizing a Pekalongan Regency that is free of stunting and competitive. This program is clear evidence of the synergy between the local government, the private sector, and the community to create fundamental change through a sustained commitment to

providing the facilities and infrastructure for the MBG program. This program has enabled Pekalongan Regency to transform from simply providing assistance to a collective movement that promotes independence and nutritional awareness in the Pekalongan Regency area, thereby realizing the pillars of the MBG program: Nutritional Quality, Distribution Efficiency, and Community Empowerment.

### **Methodology**

This research method was conducted using a qualitative approach to the management and administrators of MBG in order to gather in-depth data and information regarding the operations and criteria of the Halal Assurance System as well as field observations from the beginning of the process to the end of food distribution.

### **Result and Discussion**

The free nutritious meal program aims to provide free nutritious meals to students, with a focus on improving their health and motivation to learn. According to data, around 41% of students in Indonesia experience hunger while studying, which has a negative impact on their concentration and academic performance. Therefore, the main objectives of this program are to improve students' nutritional intake, reduce stunting rates, and address malnutrition among children, while encouraging student motivation and participation in learning activities. The beneficiaries of this program include school children from various levels of education, toddlers, pregnant women, and nursing mothers (Merlinda & Yusmar Yusuf, 2025a).

The implementation of free school lunch programs can be carried out in various ways. Some examples include the universal provision of free lunches, targeted programs, government-planned initiatives, and programs led by local residents and volunteers. The goal of providing free lunches to all eligible children in schools is to increase student engagement and reduce food insecurity (Turner, et al. 2019; Zuercher, et al. 2024 in Desiani & Syafiq, 2025).

Challenges in the field include the absence of halal labels and expiration dates on some products, incomplete halal certification for food providers, and limited infrastructure and halal auditors. The gap between regulations and practices indicates that the protection of Muslim consumers' rights to obtain halal and *thayyib* food is not yet fully guaranteed (Rayhan & Zulham, 2025).

The aspect of "nutritious" or *thayyib* in the concept of Halalan *Tayyiban* is also examined separately, emphasizing that halal food must be good, healthy, and nutritionally balanced. Nutritionists from UGM, for example, remind us that MBG menus should not be arbitrary and must meet the nutritional needs of Indonesian children to achieve optimal results (UGM, 2024).

In the context of Islamic law and Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah, the MBG program is seen as a reflection of the values of *maslahah* (public interest) and *ta‘āwun* (mutual assistance). This is in line with the objectives of Sharia in preserving life

(*hifz al-nafs*) and intellect (*hifz al-‘aql*), because good nutrition is fundamental to physical health and learning ability (Lakshmi & Mariska, 2025).

Another study analyzed MBG from the perspective of Hadith, concluding that the free nutritious food policy is an act that is highly recommended by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, with the aim of creating a superior generation. This provides a strong spiritual foundation and religious legitimacy for the program (Al-Hasyimi, 2025).

The government, through the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH), actively supports this program with a focus on accelerating halal certification, recognizing the urgency of this aspect for legal certainty and public peace of mind. This support demonstrates the state's commitment to ensuring that the free food distributed is not only nutritious but also complies with Islamic law (BPJPH, 2025).

Socio-politically, MBG is also analyzed within the framework of social justice. The goal is to improve welfare, especially for students, and reduce inequality in access to basic needs. However, its implementation has given rise to public dynamics and scrutiny regarding the effectiveness and management of the policy (Kiftiyah et al., 2025).

The need for halal and nutritious food also extends to Indonesian migrant workers abroad, demonstrating that awareness of *halalan tayyiban* is a global issue. Research shows that training is available to raise migrant workers' awareness of the importance of consuming halal and nutritious food, reflecting that this concept is internalized as an important part of the Muslim lifestyle (ResearchGate, 2025).

To ensure the success of the MBG program, various studies recommend strengthening technical regulations, accelerating halal certification, improving the monitoring system, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Collaboration between the government, halal certification agencies, and food providers is key to ensuring that this program runs optimally, effectively, and meets legal and sharia requirements (Rayhan & Zulham, 2025).

Thus, the synergy between halal certification (religious and food safety aspects) and nutrition (health and benefit aspects) is at the core of the sustainability of the Free Nutritious Meals program. Published journals reflect multidisciplinary efforts to review this public policy from legal, nutritional, sharia, and public administration perspectives, ensuring that its benefits are truly maximized for recipients (Lendra et al., 2025).

The enactment of Law Number 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantee (JPH) provides a legal basis for the regulation of halal products in Indonesia, which is one of the government's efforts to guarantee and provide legal

certainty for halal products. Based on Article 4, it is explained that products that enter, circulate, and are traded in Indonesia must be halal certified.

Islam provides rules regarding the consumption of products, namely consuming halal and good products, as stated in QS. Albaqarah verse 168, which means: "O mankind, eat from (food) that is halal and good on earth and do not follow the footsteps of Satan, for Satan is your clear enemy." Based on Government Regulation No. 39 of 2021 concerning the Implementation of the Halal Product Assurance Sector, in order to maintain the continuity of the halal product process, business actors are required to implement a halal product assurance system. The halal product assurance system is a systematic and integrated approach that is developed, implemented, and maintained by identifying ingredients and contamination of ingredients in the production process, products, resources, and procedures in order to ensure and maintain the continuity of the halal product process, in accordance with the requirements set by BPJPH, so that the MBG Kitchen not only meets the Building Standards applied in the implementation of the MBG Kitchen construction, but also meets the aspects of nutritious, halal, and good food.

The Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) as the food provider in the MBG kitchen must ensure the halal status and quality of the food to be delivered to schools, as well as maintain the integrity of halal standards throughout the entire production process from start to finish, including the distribution of the food.

The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) acts as the main administrator of the MBG program and is also legally and morally responsible under the Halal Product Guarantee Law. Article 5 paragraph 1 of the law states that the government is responsible for implementing the JPH, where the organizer implements the Halal Product Guarantee through the Halal Product Guarantee Agency ( , BPJPH), so that the BGN has the responsibility to coordinate with the BPJPH to ensure that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (Dapur Makan Bergizi Gratis) meets the halal standards in accordance with the SJPH, so that the SPPG receives consistent and continuous guidance on the Halal Guarantee system.

Pekalongan is one of the regions with a Muslim majority. There are many religious-based educational institutions, both formal and informal, so many people assume that the food they eat is definitely halal. The implementation of Halal Product Assurance in the Pekalongan region has not been fully implemented, and many people are certain that the food served is halal. However, as stated in QS. Al Baqarah verse 168, it has been explained that food must be halal and good.

Food selected from halal ingredients and properly processed, ensuring that the food served is definitely halal. However, "halal" food is not necessarily good, for example: Halal food contaminated with bacteria, causing the food content to

spoil, thus making the food halal but not good. This can be caused by negligence in the storage, packaging, and distribution processes, or by other factors.

The MBG kitchen must directly implement the Halal Product Assurance System in its manufacturing process. The author conducted field research in the Pekalongan Regency area.

The MBG kitchen in Pekalongan Regency, which is divided into several areas, has not yet fully committed and taken responsibility for consistently and continuously producing halal products by complying with regulations related to Halal Product Guarantee (JPH), using halal ingredients, and implementing the Halal Product Process (PPH) in accordance with applicable regulations. as well as preparing human resources to support the implementation of Halal Products in the company (MBG Kitchen), and socializing and communicating halal policies to related parties to ensure that all personnel maintain halal integrity in their companies. The factors causing the implementation of the Nutrition Program and the challenges in ensuring the halal status of food products (Free Nutritious Meal Kitchen in the Pekalongan Regency) have not been maximized because only some of the SPPG have participated in training as part of the implementation of halal certification in the nutrition fulfillment service unit (SPPG), which aims to ensure that every product in the MBG Kitchen meets halal standards. as supervisors responsible for the implementation of the Halal Assurance Program (PPH), from the procurement of raw materials to the serving of meals in the MBG program's Free Nutritious Meal Kitchen. With the presence of halal supervisors in each SPPG, the principles of trustworthiness, traceability, and transparency can truly be applied from start to finish, to produce healthy, safe, nutritious, halal, and thoyyib products (BPJPH.halal.go.id). SPPGs who have been trained as halal supervisors by participating in prior training before joining MBG as SPPGs already hold halal supervisor certificates in accordance with BPJPH regulations when they become SPPGs at MBG.

### **Conclusion**

Halal assurance of food products (free nutritious kitchen in the Pekalongan district) / a study of halal kitchens in the Pekalongan district shows that there are shortcomings in the regulations of the Halal Product Assurance System in MBG Kitchens. Commitment and responsibility in the implementation of the SJPH show weaknesses in the criteria and responsibilities, as there is no halal policy from the halal supervisor, even though it is already fulfilled internally. The responsible team has conducted training and education from the implementing party once a month, There are weaknesses due to the absence of a Halal Supervisor, so that product criteria do not meet SJPH, but the products meet the standards in terms of location, place, and equipment used. The facilities used, from processing, storage, packaging,

distribution, sales, and serving, are in accordance with standards in terms of hygiene and cleanliness.

The kitchen location is separate in terms of ingredient storage, processing, and cleaning of equipment used, as well as direct internal audit monitoring. Because some SPPGs do not yet have halal supervisor certification, the food served as MBG Halal and good has not been fully met. Therefore, accelerated steps are needed for SPPG to immediately undergo training as halal supervisors in accordance with halal policies. This involves socialization to all relevant parties in the MBG kitchen to ensure that everyone maintains halal integrity in the MBG kitchen, whether through meetings, employment contracts, and so on.

The MBG Kitchen management must be committed and responsible for the availability of adequate resources in the implementation of PPH in the MBG kitchen through the assurance and guarantee of halal integrity from all workers, as well as implementing SJPH to maintain consistent halal products, halal management team, halal supervisors, and implemented in the form of a letter of appointment for the Halal Management Team and/or Halal Supervisors, as well as training for workers in the MBG kitchen by conducting internal training so that workers can understand SJH and SJPH in the MBG kitchen.

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