

# CENTRAL ASIAN SEASONAL WORKERS ON UK FARMS – BRIEF 2: RELIGION AND DIET

The Central Asian region includes the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan<sup>1</sup>. As the British agricultural sector increasingly engages with seasonal workers from this region, it becomes crucial to understand how workers' identity and culture derive from their history and language. This knowledge will not only foster a more inclusive and respectful working environment but also enhance the well-being and productivity of Central Asian employees.

## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES: ISLAM

The predominant religion in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan is Islam, specifically Sunni Islam. There are also Christian and other religious minorities. Islam plays a significant role in the daily lives of many Central Asian people, influencing their cultural norms, social behaviors, and dietary practices. **The majority of seasonal workers coming to the UK are likely to be Muslims.**

Prayer (Salah) - In Central Asia people use the term "namaz".

Practicing Muslims are required to pray five times a day at specific times: Fajr (dawn), Dhuhr (noon), Asr (afternoon), Maghrib (sunset), and Isha (night). Prayer times differ slightly based on where you are in the UK. [The East London Mosque](#) provides updated prayer times for the London area and FAQs about other parts of the UK and about Ramadan. It is essential that UK growers provide designated prayer spaces and allow flexible break times to accommodate these prayer routines. In general, each prayer time may take up to 20 minutes. In total, 1 hour per day for praying.

Additionally, Muslim men are required to perform the Friday Salah (Jumu'ah) congregational prayer, which is an essential aspect of their religious practice. This prayer occurs every Friday around midday and includes a sermon (khutbah) followed by a group prayer (approx. 40 minutes).

## KEY 2025 RELIGIOUS PERIODS THAT NEED TO BE RESPECTED

### *Yearly fasting period - Ramadan*

Ramadan, a holy month of fasting and spiritual reflection, is observed by Muslims annually. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, refraining from eating, drinking, and smoking. Employers should consider adjusting work schedules and providing support during this period, by offering meal spaces for Suhoor (the meal before dawn) and Iftar (the meal after sunset).

**2025 Ramadan dates for the UK: starts 28 February and ends March 30 (depends on moon sightings)**

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<sup>1</sup> Turkmenistan is the 5<sup>th</sup> country in Central Asia; it is not included here as currently there are not many seasonal workers from this country to the UK.

## DIET

*Dietary Habits:* Central Asian cuisine is characterized by its unique use of ingredients and traditional cooking methods. Food also plays a key part in the practice of hospitality, which is central to the region's culture. The dietary habits of people from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan are influenced by their cultural heritage and religious beliefs, particularly Islam.

*Halal Food* - Muslims follow dietary laws prescribed by Islam, known as Halal. Halal food is prepared following specific guidelines, and certain foods and beverages are prohibited (Haram).

*Prohibited Foods* - Muslims do not consume pork or pork products, nor alcohol, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. These practices reflect the integration of faith into everyday life, shaping not only what people eat but how they approach food.

### *Relevance to UK farms:*

- Provide designated prayer spaces and allow flexible break times to accommodate prayer routines.
- Provide Halal food options in canteens, farm shops and during company events, and ensure access to appropriate food shops. All meat needs to be slaughtered according to Halal principles. Avoid cross-contamination with non-Halal foods.
- Ensure that meals provided do not contain prohibited items and that alternatives are available. Respect the prohibition of alcohol during social events and gatherings.

### **Common foods, ingredients and traditional dishes of Central Asia:**

- Plov (Pilaf): A popular dish made with rice, meat (usually lamb or beef), onions, carrots, and spices, often prepared in large quantities and served at communal gatherings and special occasions.
- Shashlik: Grilled skewered meat, often served with bread and vegetables.
- Lagman: A noodle dish with meat and vegetables in a flavourful broth.
- Manti: Steamed dumplings filled with meat or vegetables.
- Samsa: baked pastries stuffed with savoury fillings such as meat, potatoes, or pumpkin.
- Shurbo: a hearty soup made with meat and vegetables.
- Bread: Bread holds significant cultural importance and is often served with every meal.
- Tea: Tea, particularly green tea, is a staple beverage and is often consumed throughout the day. Sharing tea is more than just a refreshment; it symbolizes respect, warmth, and a sense of community.
- Fruits, nuts, and dairy products like katyk (fermented milk) are also commonly enjoyed.