



Promoting the observance of Kashrus through supervision, education & service.

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A Primer to Kosher Certification

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There was a time when a woman did all of her family's preparation in her own kitchen. Back then, it was obvious that bacon was not kosher and ice cream was kosher. In the past few decades, there has been a revolution in American eating habits. Almost 90% of our foods are processed before reaching our kitchen. Now, the artificial bacon might be kosher and dairy; the ice cream might not be kosher.

These developments in the food industry have been paralleled with the growth of kosher certifying agencies which insure processed food to be certified kosher. Modern kosher consumers can now purchased these products with confidence.

It has been estimated that approximately 1/2 of all shelf products in our supermarkets are certified kosher. This makes the kosher food industry a 150 billion dollar a year industry!

Why does a company become certified?

Usually a company requests it! The reasons for requesting kosher certification can be for the company's own desire to produce kosher products, appeals from consumers or requests from industrial customers. Sometimes company "A" wants to "go kosher" and finds out that ingredients coming from company "B" are not kosher and that's why company "B" is looking to be certified.

The process:

Once contact is made the detective work begins. The manufacturers must supply a complete list of every product they desire to be certified, including all

ingredients, preservatives, release agents, stabilizers and other inert ingredients. In addition every step in the manufacturing process, cleaning agents, equipment, and details of other products manufactured in the same facility must be submitted as well. Then the company receives its first inspection from one of the rabbis to see first hand the actual production and check the ingredients found in the plant against what has been submitted by the company. Then the fun begins! The certifying agency may have to investigate each ingredient back to its ultimate source.

For example:

- “ Meat or meat byproducts: Must be strictly kosher. First, the meat has to be slaughtered according to strict rules of biblical origin, followed by a “kashering” procedure that removes all blood from the meat. Then, it has to be packaged and sealed by the supervising Rabbi.
- “ Dairy or dairy byproducts: Have to be strictly kosher as well. Cheese products use rennet, an enzyme, as a curdling and coagulating agent. This can be derived from lining membranes of the stomach of suckling calves, which must come from kosher slaughtered calves or microbial rennet derived solely from vegetable sources.
- “ Oils and release agents: The FDA will allow a company to label a product 100% vegetable oil but still to contain as much as 2% of animal fat in it! Obviously, oil needs to be strictly kosher as well.

Some ingredients with innocuous sounding names need more than a cursory glance:

- “ Carmine or Cochineal: A favored choice for red food coloring in many foods. Source- beetles from South America.
- “ Ambergris: A natural “softener” and flavor. Source- sperm whale intestine.
- “ Civet Absolute: A natural flavor found primarily in beverages, ice cream and candy. Source- cats.

All these additives and others are offered to the unsuspecting consumer as “natural flavors” which of-course they are! However, “natural” does not necessarily equal kosher.

- “ The hygienic standards must be checked as well to insure that worms or insects have not contaminated the product. Unfortunately, such problems are more common than one might think. The FDA, for example, will allow up to 10 fly eggs per 100 grams of tomato juice; up to 50 insect fragments and up to 9 mg of rodent excreta per 50 grams of cereal. The list goes on. As we all know, the Torah's standard for kashrus is higher than that!

The results of these investigations are forwarded to the rabbinical authority of the supervising agency. Once all is acceptable, they then must determine how much onsite supervision is necessary. This information is then put into a contract and sent to the manufacturer. This contract also specifies the manufacturer agrees to make no changes of ingredients without prior written consent from the agency. The onsite inspector (Mashgiach) will verify that the company is in compliance of the contracted agreement.

What does all this cost?

The cost is usually minimal. For non-profit agencies, the cost typically depends on the amount of onsite work required. For “profit” agencies a typical charge might be a annual fee plus a percentage based on gross sales. There is usually no increase in the price of the product due to its kosher certification, because that cost is generally met by the increased sales of that product.

The Vaad Hakashrus of Dallas is a non-profit supervising agency helping the Dallas area keep kosher for over 40 years. The kosher consumer could purchase any item certified by the DK with confidence, knowing that we meet the highest standard for kosher supervision. At present the DK has accounts across the Texas and neighboring states.