



## KEEPING KOSHER

### KOSHER 101

*By: Admin*

#### **Definitions**

The Jewish religion incorporates within its tenets a regimen of dietary laws. These laws determine which food is acceptable and in conformity with Jewish Law. The word kosher is an adaptation of the Hebrew word meaning fit or proper. It refers to foodstuffs that meet the dietary requirements of Jewish Law.

There is a prevalent misconception that kosher reflects the conferring of a blessing on food by a Rabbi. There is no truth to this whatsoever. Jewish ritual does require the recitation of a blessing prior to the consumption of food as a gesture of appreciation and acknowledgment of the Divine source of sustenance. However, this requirement applies to everyone, not just a Rabbi. This has no connection with kosher requirements or status.

The barometer of kosher and non-kosher depends on two variables: the source of the ingredients and the status of the production equipment. Kosher certification, which is the guarantee that the food meets kosher requirements, revolves around these two criteria.

#### **Sources**

The guidelines for the sources of kosher and non-kosher materials originate in the Bible. The interpretations and decisions of the Rabbis of the post-Biblical era have added detail, organization, and explanation to these dietary laws. In the main, prohibited sources include all flesh of animals which lack either split hooves or do not chew the cud. This category includes pork. Poultry and meat are permissible from animals that are slaughtered by humane



methods dictated by Jewish Law and carried out by specially trained ritual slaughterers. The only types of fish permitted are those that have both fins and scales. This requirement would exclude seafood such as shrimp and lobster.

All natural grape derivatives have special kosher considerations. Since wine has sacramental significance in Jewish ritual, the Rabbis enacted laws regarding its acceptability and use. All natural grape products must come from grape juice that has been supervised from start to finish. Only these grape products can be certified and approved as kosher.

Cheese products such as Cheddar, Muenster, Swiss, and the like, can be certified kosher only if produced under constant supervision. It is common practice for cheese manufacturers to use rennet derived from non-kosher sources as a coagulant. Kosher cheese must be produced with kosher microbial coagulants to satisfy kosher requirements. For this reason, supervision of kosher cheese production was made a standard prerequisite.

Products of fruit and vegetable derivation are approved for kosher use, providing there is no insect infestation.

Agricultural products coming from Israel have unique kosher requirements and are only acceptable when under Rabbinical supervision.

### **Equipment**

1. Equipment used to manufacture products containing non-kosher ingredients may acquire non-kosher status. Thus, production that takes place after non-kosher production is completed can be rendered non-kosher by virtue of the equipment used, even if the ingredients are kosher.

2. Non-kosher equipment can be restored to a kosher mode by a variety of ways, usually depending upon the way in which the non-kosher product was produced. This process is referred to as Kasherization. Usage of a non-kosher product in conjunction with liquid, e.g. a non-kosher soup, requires treating the kettle with boiling water to restore its kosher status. Non-kosher products that were produced where there is no liquid cooking medium, i.e. an oven band, require a different technique. This equipment must be treated by high heat in order to restore its kosher status.

### **Parve and Dairy**

These terms relate to the status of kosher food. Pareve is a Hebrew word meaning neutral. It indicates that the product does not contain any derivatives of poultry, meat, or dairy ingredients. The reason for these designations is based on one of the central pillars of dietary laws that does not allow for the combining of meat and milk. Therefore, a pareve product may be eaten with either a meat, poultry, or dairy meal. The designation Dairy indicates that it may not be included in a meat or poultry meal. Similarly, a designation of Pareve indicates all-over acceptability within the scope of any meal. Examples of these products that must bear the Dairy designation are as follows:

- Ice Cream
- Cookies or crackers containing whey or milk powder

- Products that contain no dairy ingredients but are heat-processed on equipment that was utilized for the production of products that do contain dairy ingredients.

Understandably, from a kosher marketing point of view, products that bear a Pareve designation are most marketable since they are universally useable in conjunction with any type of meal.

The dairy and parve designations appear in conjunction with the Star-K emblem of kosher certification on products that are used throughout the food industry.

The purpose of this primer is to give a basic introduction to the details and systems of Kosher Certification. There is, of course, much more to it than the primer contains. The process of Kosher Certification is a dynamic one, with much to be learned and shared between the company and the Star-K.