



# Imported Kosher Food

Imports of kosher food to the Israeli market have increased greatly over the past twenty years. Studies show that over fifty percent of food sold in Israeli supermarkets is imported, and that number continues to climb each year.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel certifies thousands of facilities around Israel and uses substantial manpower to provide this service. The Rabbinate never intended to certify products and facilities outside of Israel, as its purpose is to certify kosher food for the local Israeli market.

The term “*B’ishur HaRabbanute Harashit*” (authorized by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel) appears on every kosher imported product that passes through the Rabbinate system. As opposed to the certification of local products, the Rabbinate has neither the manpower nor the finances to check and certify factories worldwide. This being the case, a number of years ago (when the import market was much smaller than it is now), the Rabbinate decided it would permit kosher products with foreign certifications to be imported, as long as the standards of the imported products more or less coincided with the standards of the Chief Rabbinate. The Rabbinate has no system to confirm the standards of foreign *hechsherim* and relies on written testimony only.

Unfortunately, there are many irregularities

in the realm of kashrut supervision, particularly when huge numbers of products are being manufactured abroad and then imported to Israel. Some kashrut agencies are making use of extreme leniencies, based on minority opinions that have been rejected by virtually all *poskim* over the generations. We are not referring merely to issues of, for example, *Chalav Stam* or *Chadash*. There have been documented cases of lenient kashrut organizations granting certification by phone/fax, without *kashering* any equipment or even showing up in person to supervise. In addition, there were cases in which ingredients were not checked properly and no regular visits took place. In other cases, specific products were labeled “Chalav Yisrael” or “Kosher for Passover” when in fact the halachic standards of these categories were not met in the factories. One should note, however, that even if *bediavad* (ex post facto) these products might not “treif” one’s dishes, one should choose to avoid relying on weak, flimsy leniencies.

Unreliable *hechsherim* are particularly widespread in the house brands of Israeli supermarkets as well as with large Israeli food companies marketing imported items under their own labels. Unfortunately, consumers mistakenly assume that *B’ishur HaRabbanute Harashit* on the label signifies that the Rabbanut has properly checked the product and approves its supervision.

The OU Israeli office has made great strides in the last few years regarding imported products. We have built a strong connection with the import division of the Chief Rabbinate,

The OU Israel Gustave & Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education was created to raise awareness and educate the public in all areas of kashrut. Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Deputy Rabbinic Administrator for OU Kosher Israel is the Center's director.



and importers have taken interest in OU products.

For the consumer's part, when choosing imported products, one should always confirm that there is a reliable certification (a hechsher that you would trust if you were living overseas). This policy is familiar to kosher consumers living abroad, but less so in Israel. Upon seeing an unfamiliar hechsher, one should ask a rabbi who is knowledgeable in modern kashrut (and preferably involved with kashrut certification overseas).

If stores and importers were to realize that reliable and genuine kashrut is a priority for so many consumers, they would be more inclined to change their policies. We must strive as kosher consumers to demand products with reliable certification, both in Israel and around the world, and to reject products of questionable status. When we do this, we gain merit not only for our own good deeds, but in addition, we are doing a true *chesed* (helpful deed) for the kosher consumer in Israel. By improving the kashrut standards of imported foods, we help those in Israeli society who truly want to keep kosher.

It is important to note that imported OU products approved by the Chief Rabbinate hold up to the highest standards of kosher protocol including *Yoshon*, *Afiat Yisrael* (when applicable), *Bishul Yisrael* (when applicable) and *Chalav Yisrael*. Although OU Kosher worldwide is not stringent in these areas based on numerous halachic considerations, we accept the standards the Chief Rabbinate has decided to apply and has conformed to them. For any questions or inquiries on OU products sold in Israel feel to contact the Gustave and Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education. ■

### Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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