



Eating Out in Israel – Part 3

When addressing the issue of certifying food-service establishments in Israel, the obstacles are significant. Israel has an enormous number of restaurants, caterers, cafés, hotels, event halls, and other food-service establishments. In some cases, these establishments are very small and isolated, making them difficult and costly to certify properly. In other cases, establishments can be extremely large, with multiple kitchens, preparation areas, storage facilities, and hundreds of employees. These larger operations present an entirely different set of challenges for a kosher certification agency.

Another important factor is the population that many establishments are trying to serve. A significant portion of Israel's food-service industry is geared toward the general, non-religious population. As a result, there is often a preference for the least expensive and least demanding level of kosher certification. Higher standards generally require more supervision, more expensive ingredients, additional equipment, and stricter procedures, all of which increase operating costs.

It should be emphasized that the purpose of this series is not to disparage different kosher standards in Israel or to frighten consumers away from eating out. There are many restaurants, caterers, hotels, and event

halls operating under excellent and highly reliable kosher supervision. Rather, the purpose of this series is to provide consumers with knowledge and guidance so that those who are looking for a higher level of kashrus can understand what questions to ask and what standards to look for.

LEAFY VEGETABLES

Over the last several decades, the issue of insect infestation in fruits and vegetables has become a major concern in the kosher food industry. Leafy vegetables and other produce can contain insects that are difficult to detect, particularly when they are hidden within folds and crevices of the vegetable.

Produce such as lettuce, herbs, basil, spinach, parsley, and similar leafy vegetables can present significant halachic concerns. The issue is not merely theoretical; visible insects can be found in produce that has not been properly inspected or grown under controlled conditions.

The Israeli kosher-supervision industry, particularly the Mehadrin certifications, has made significant advances in addressing this problem. One of the most important developments has been the use of controlled growing systems and specialized greenhouses designed to greatly reduce the likelihood of insect infestation. These systems are carefully monitored, and the produce is subsequently inspected according to the standards of the certifying agency.

This has dramatically changed the way many kosher establishments deal with leafy vegetables. Rather than relying exclusively



on the consumer or kitchen staff to discover insects after the produce has arrived at the restaurant, the goal is to prevent the problem at the source.

The Chief Rabbinate has made efforts to address this phenomenon and establish procedures for dealing with infested produce. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the kosher status of produce sold in a supermarket and the standards expected of a certified food-service establishment. Supermarkets are generally permitted to sell fresh produce even when that produce may have a significant infestation risk. The responsibility for properly checking such produce rests with the consumer.

For a kosher restaurant, however, the situation is different. To create a viable system all leafy vegetables should only be from greenhouse grown supervised produce that prevents any type of infestation. Mashgichim should also routinely check the produce to make sure the non-infested standards are met.

TERUMOT AND MA'ASROT

Living in Eretz Yisrael comes with the tremendous privilege of observing the **mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz**—the agricultural mitzvot that apply specifically to produce grown in the Land of Israel. Among these are **terumah**, **ma'aser**, and the various laws associated with the agricultural cycles of the Land, including **Shemittah**.

For a food-service establishment in Israel, these mitzvot create another important area of responsibility.

Many organized restaurants purchase their produce from large distributors or centralized storage facilities. These facilities may have a mashgiach who ensures that the appropriate tithes are separated before the produce reaches the restaurant. The same type of system is often used by large supermarket chains.

However, not every restaurant operates this way.

Specialty restaurants, chef-driven establishments, and restaurants that pride themselves on using unique or locally sourced produce may purchase directly from individual farmers or specialty growers. In such cases, the usual centralized system may not be sufficient. The kosher supervisor must determine whether the produce has been properly tithed and, where necessary, ensure that the appropriate **terumot and ma'asrot** are taken.

This requires attention to detail. The mashgiach should verify that each shipment of produce comes from an approved source and that the necessary documentation accompanies the order. Where appropriate, the documentation should contain the relevant signature, stamp, or other confirmation that the produce has been properly handled according to halachic requirements.

WINE AND ALCOHOL

Historically, many alcoholic beverages were sometimes approved without the same level of scrutiny applied to other ingredients. Today, however, kosher agencies are much more aware of the potential kashrus concerns associated with alcoholic beverages.

Whisky, beer, tequila, liqueurs, flavored spirits, and other alcoholic products can contain a variety of ingredients and may undergo complicated production processes. These can include flavorings, colorants, additives, aging processes, and equipment shared with non-kosher products. Consequently, the assumption that an alcoholic beverage is automatically kosher simply because it contains alcohol is not sufficient.

Wine has an additional and particularly important set of halachic requirements.

The production of kosher wine or grape juice requires Jewish participation and supervision throughout the relevant stages of production. But the concerns do not end once the wine has been produced.

There is a separate halachic issue regarding the handling of **non-mevushal wine**. Under the relevant laws of *stam yayin*, wine that has not undergone the appropriate cooking process cannot be handled or poured by a non-Jew. Many authorities also extend the practical concern to wine being handled by a person who is not considered *Shomer Shabbat* for these purposes.

This creates a unique challenge in Israeli food service.

In much of the kosher food industry outside Israel, the overwhelming majority of wine and grape juice served in kosher establishments is **mevushal**. This allows the wine to be handled and poured by staff without creating the same concern.

The Israeli market is different. There is a much larger market for quality non-mevushal wines, and many Israeli consumers prefer them because they are viewed as superior in taste and quality. Consequently, a restaurant may have perfectly kosher non-mevushal wine on its menu while employing staff who may not be permitted to handle it according to the standards of the certifying agency.

Therefore, consumers who are particular about this issue should ascertain what the establishment's policy is regarding non-mevushal wine. The same question applies to caterers, wedding halls, hotels, and other venues where wine may be opened and poured by numerous employees.

In certain establishments one of the mashgiach's responsibilities may be to ensure that non-mevushal wine is opened and poured only by an individual who meets the necessary halachic requirements. This scenario is not always ideal and isn't always recommended.

KASHERING INTERNAL ORGANS

Another issue that deserves particular attention in Israel is the preparation of internal organs.

It is quite common in Israel to find various organs served as part of a meat menu, including **liver, heart, spleen**, and other internal organs. These products are also readily available in many Israeli supermarkets and butcher shops.

Unlike ordinary cuts of meat, certain internal organs—most notably liver—require a special kashering process because of the large amount of blood contained within them. This process requires careful attention to detail. The liver must be prepared properly, the broiling must be performed correctly, and

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the equipment and procedures must meet the requirements of halacha. A mistake in the process can create serious kashrus concerns.

Outside Israel, it is common for kosher meat distributors to sell these organs only after they have already undergone the necessary koshering process. This reduces the possibility of mistakes at the retail or food-service level. In Israel, however, it is much more common to encounter raw internal organs that still require proper koshering.

For this reason, kosher certifiers must pay particular attention to how these products enter the restaurant and who is responsible for preparing them.

Ideally, only properly trained personnel should be responsible for the koshering of internal organs. In a restaurant operating under a strict kosher program, this responsibility should preferably be placed under the direct supervision of the **mashgiach** or a properly trained **Ne'eman Kashrut**. The procedures should be clearly defined, and the supervisor should ensure that the process is performed consistently.

This is particularly important in restaurants that serve large quantities of liver or other internal organs. The greater the volume of production, the greater the need for a reliable system that does not depend simply on an employee's memory or personal knowledge.

BUILDING A PROPER KOSHER PROGRAM

As we can see, there are numerous issues surrounding food service in Israel. The examples discussed in this series represent only some of the many areas that a kosher certification agency must consider.

A proper program therefore requires **clear standards, reliable suppliers, well-trained staff, effective supervision, and constant**

attention to detail. Most importantly, the program must be designed around the specific establishment. A small café, a large restaurant, a hotel, and a wedding hall may all require very different systems of supervision.

For the consumer, understanding these issues provides an important tool. The goal is not to create suspicion or to discourage people from eating out. Rather, it is to understand what stands behind a reliable kosher certification and why different certifications may establish different standards.

In the end, **kosher certification is only as strong as the system that stands behind it.** ■

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