

A Guide to Understanding Kosher

Introduction

The traditions and background of Kosher are well established as a respected and admired international standalone quality certification. This is corroborated by the increased demand from the food industry for Kosher Certification as it represents a more rigorous food testing process. The phrase 'Is it Kosher?' has even infiltrated the English language as if to say - 'Is it correct?', 'Is it OK?' But this is more Cockney expressionism rather than reality! Therefore Kosher means acceptable. Foods that are not acceptable, that are not compliant with Jewish dietary laws are termed non-Kosher and colloquially referred to as treif.

Part of the whole Kosher process used to be shrouded in mystery with rabbis coming to the factory, hands in the air to 'Bless the plant'! That myth can be dispelled with immediately, as today, Kosher is globally known and Kosher food technologists are experts in their field and rabbinic auditors are both very worldly and knowledgeable about food processing.

Today nearly every quality assurance manager, food technologist, production manager and indeed purchasing and sales personnel alike, recognise Kosher as a key aspect of regulatory policy. Even where excellent government legislation regulates production of foods and related products, they are often exceeded by the stringencies of the Kosher standard. Indeed, Kosher importantly provides an extra 'Badge of Integrity' that producers and consumers both appreciate. Typically the Kosher Code provides the rules for purity in processing of foods, and the highest temperatures in cleansing of utensils, kettles, and pipe work, thereby reducing the transmission of unwanted food particles from one product to another. Increased transparency through Kosher certification strengthens supplier trustworthiness.

The Market for Kosher

Kosher products potentially have the widest consumer appeal. Some consumers consider that Kosher means purity of ingredients. And vegetarians know a parev (neutral) label means that product contains absolutely no meat or dairy ingredients. Families with food allergies such as those with a lactose intolerance, who must avoid hidden milk ingredients, also appreciate Kosher products for that same reason. Indeed it might surprise many that the Muslim community, following a Halal diet, are also regular buyers of Kosher foods. It is generally accepted that Kosher certification is at a higher standard than Halal.

For an ingredient or retail product that is Kosher certified, it is usual for the Kosher logo to be shown on the packaging so consumers and inspectors alike can see it. According to Prepared Foods the annual value of Kosher retail products (in 2013) was \$305 billion, and that was only in the United States.

The size of the market is difficult to determine due to a lack of recent research. However, in the ingredients market in Europe taking the exhibition FI Europe as a barometer it is estimated that at least 70% of exhibitors offer some Kosher certified ingredients. In the retail market taking Anuga 2011 as an indicator 15% of exhibitors offered some Kosher certified products.



Interest in delivering new Kosher products comes from small and large manufacturers alike. The consumer looking for Kosher foods has long since broadened their palate from the traditional Jewish fayre. Cuisines with a strong Kosher representation include Italian, Thai, Chinese, Indian and Japanese.

The retail sector, albeit the largest, is not the only market in town for Kosher. Food service is important for public funded institutions such as the NHS, Prison Service, as well as school meals, hospitals and elderly services. Furthermore food-on-the-go (FOTG), an extension of the retail aisle in cafes and on trains, planes and cruise ships, presents more opportunities.

What Is Kosher?

For a product to be Kosher certified, each ingredient, food additive and processing aid used in its production, must also be Kosher certified or approved. With much recent publicity the term Kosher is frequently misunderstood as being singularly something to do with the slaughter of meat (shechita). Of course the preparation of animals to provide the community with Kosher meat is very important; however this is a subject on its own, with separate regulatory authorities, and is not elaborated further in this guide.

It is worth mentioning however, that central to maintaining a Kosher lifestyle is the separation of meat and milk. Meat and milk products may not be mixed in the same product, or produced using the same utensils. Additionally, the production process must be suitable for Kosher requirements and therefore it must be approved by a rabbinic auditor. Products may be rendered non-Kosher if their production lines and equipment are also used to manufacture non-Kosher products.

Kosher foods must meet the complex and strict requirements of Jewish law. To monitor this, rabbis audit production and packaging operations within food and drink manufacturing, in order that they can certify that the products meet all Kosher requirements.

Additionally, certain cooked foods require a Jewish supervisor to be involved in the preparation in order for the product to be Kosher e.g. by turning on the oven. Today, with continuous production so prevalent this is not often an insurmountable challenge. For plants where non-Kosher products have been previously processed, it is nevertheless often possible to clean or 'Kosherise' the plant for batch production if required.

Kosher also applies to non-food products and can include cleaning products, water softeners, food containers, and packaging and cosmetics.



Key Food Headings

MEAT & POULTRY

As instructed in the Bible, not all animals and birds are Kosher. Common animals that are Kosher include: cow, goat and sheep i.e. those that have spilt hooves and chew the cud. Common animals that are not Kosher include: pig, horse, camel and rabbit. Most poultry is Kosher. This includes: chicken, turkey, goose and duck.

In order for meat and poultry to be Kosher there are additional requirements. These include slaughter in accordance with Jewish law and removal of blood via salting or roasting. This must all be done under strict rabbinical supervision. Retail products containing any animal or poultry derived ingredient are assumed to be non-Kosher unless certified by a reputable Kosher agency.

DAIRY

Dairy products must come from Kosher animals. In countries where the source of milk is guaranteed by civil law (e.g. member states of the EU and USA), some Jewish authorities allow milk products without full-time Kosher supervision. Some communities still require their milk to be fully rabbinically supervised; and this is known as Cholov Yisroel, or Super Kosher. Cheese products do not fall under the general dairy category. They require full-time Kosher supervision of each of the key stages of manufacture because the rennet used in normal cheese production can be derived from an animal source. Such supervision ensures full traceability.

EGGS

Eggs are only Kosher if they are from a Kosher bird and do not contain any blood spots.

FISH

Kosher fish are species that have fins, and scales that are easily removed. Common examples include: salmon, tuna, sole and plaice. Common examples of non-Kosher fish include: all shellfish, eels, shark, monkfish, huss and catfish. Roe and fish derivatives such as fish oil and gelatine must come from Kosher fish.

PAREV

When a product is classified as Parev (alternative spellings are: pareve, parve) it means that it is a neutral product, it neither contains a milk or meat substance nor was it produced with equipment that was previously used to prepare products that contained a milk or meat substance. (See Shared Equipment section below).

On the whole, parev foods present fewer Kosher complexities than either meat or dairy foods.



INSECTS

All insects are considered strictly non-Kosher. To ensure the absence of insects fruit and vegetables have to be thoroughly inspected and cleaned. Use of pesticides may be insufficient as these may kill the insects but not remove them. Some fruits and vegetables are more problematic than others e.g. artichoke hearts and strawberries. Susceptibility to bug infestation varies by season and country.

WINE AND GRAPE PRODUCTS

All products made from fresh or dried grapes such as grape juice, grape sugar, wine and wine vinegar, must be supervised for the duration of the manufacturing process and handling must be performed exclusively by a Jewish person in order for it to be deemed Kosher. All products with grape flavouring or additives must have a Kosher certificate.

OTHER ALCHOLIC DRINKS

Rum, vodka, whisky from known producing countries are acceptable, provided there are no additives. With the increase in flavoured, rums and vodkas and special finishes in whisky, e.g. maturation in sherry casks has given rise to uncertainty as regards their Kosher status. This has led to an increased demand for certification within this category.

PASSOVER

Every spring, Jewish people celebrate the festival of Passover for 8 days. On Passover no unleavened products made from the five grains - wheat, barley, oat, spelt and rye may be eaten. Products derived from them are also subject to the restrictions e.g. ethanol derived from wheat starch. Many Jewish communities extend the Passover restrictions to not eating Kitniyot – legumes (pulses) which include corn, soy, rapeseed, peanuts, peas, beans and rice.

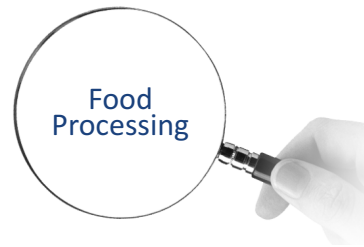
The above creates restrictions on equipment used for processing the aforementioned grains as well as their derivatives and may require the equipment to undergo a Kosherisation. Due to the sensitivity of these laws constant supervision of the production is usually required.

Kosher for Passover products are marked with a letter 'P' next to the Kosher logo.

CHODOSH

Some customers may request that your products are 'chodosh' (new crop) or 'yoshon' (old crop). This is a Kosher law that is dependent on when wheat, barley, oat, spelt and rye are planted

If you receive such a request contact your Kosher agency which will assist.



SHARED EQUIPMENT

In Kosher law, the flavour of a substance can be absorbed into and expelled from a surface / vessel through heat or storage. This principle may render some shared equipment as Non-Kosher or dairy. It may be required in some instances to 'neutralise' the unsuitable influences through Kosherisation or Kosher purge (the process of making equipment Kosher). This is done under the watchful eye of a Rabbi who is versed in the procedure, which may vary depending on the type of equipment involved.

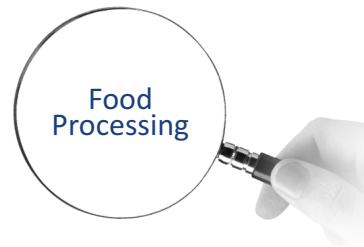
FOOD TRANSPORT

As mentioned in the Shared Equipment section above, equipment may affect the Kosher status of a product. Bulk shipments are no different and therefore if a tanker is not dedicated to a liquid product and has transported previously Non-Kosher, the Kosher product may become Non-Kosher. Therefore, a bulk shipment policy would need to be implemented which consists of making sure that the three previous loads are Kosher compatible followed by a specific cleaning procedure.

ISRAEL

When exporting to Israel it is best to involve your Kosher agency from the outset. Kosher requirements / specifications can be complex to understand. There can be explicit rules for labelling and packaging. Products exported to Israel must also comply with the Israeli Rabbinat regulations.

Agricultural products from Israel have special rules. Due to the complexity of these rules such produce is often not allowed to be used in Kosher certified products.



The Kosher Certification Process

For companies considering producing Kosher food and / or seeking certification for existing products, like any formal accreditation process, to become Kosher certified the manufacturer will be requested to provide a detailed list of all ingredients, including preservatives and any additives e.g. processing aids. All ingredients are assessed based on their Kosher sensitivity and depending on its sensitivity further information or an accompanying Kosher certificate will be required. They will also be asked to provide details on the production process. All ingredient and process details recorded are kept strictly confidential.

Following the application, and confirmation by the manufacturer, a rabbinic auditor will be sent to the plant to inspect the entire process from raw material intake through to final storage, including raw material and semi-finished product storage areas. If all is approved, the Kosher Certificate will be issued upon receipt of a signed contract and the fee.

Today there are an increasing number of brands where the company does not part, or indeed own all of the production process. This situation is fairly easy to overcome provided that the company's toll processors give permission for inspections to take place at their premises.

The ideal production scenario is that all the ingredients received in the plant are Kosher and therefore all final products have the capability to be Kosher certified. Such a set-up would be known as an all-Kosher site. However, many manufacturers continue to have customers that specify ingredients and products which are not capable of being certified as Kosher. In these circumstances Kosher certification can be achieved if a production line can be dedicated to Kosher production and that there is adequate segregation of Kosher and non-Kosher materials and production. Many companies are already ensuring food allergens are segregated. Where there is insufficient capacity for a dedicated line it may be possible that with a sufficient clean down process and weekly production planning that Kosher product could be produced at the beginning of the week. Consultation with your Kosher agency and on-site inspection will be required before proceeding.

To ensure full traceability the certification process is by nature in-depth. All packaging, both retail and industrial, should bear the Kosher logo to ensure that the product will be accepted as Kosher by the final customer.

Most companies that apply for Kosher have already standard procedures / certifications in place such as HACCP, ISO or BRC and this fact should assist in the process.



Types of Kosher Certificate

For ingredients that require a Kosher certificate, it is important to understand the following:

- There are annual Kosher certificates which are valid for a year from the date issued.
- There are batch Kosher certificates that are issued on a per batch basis and are only valid for that specific batch

There might be additional clauses added to the Kosher certificate including the necessity for the Kosher logo or a certain character in the batch code.

Marketing Advantage

Kosher assurance helps build consumer confidence. The certification has proven to be a powerful sales tool especially with use of the Kosher logo / certification mark in marketing material. This ensures that prospective customers know that products are Kosher certified and manufacturers can start the task of selling the product and its benefits.

Additionally, the importance of new product development of functional foods is recognised and the impact that has on the market place. Many food and beverage technologists are increasingly demanding Kosher flavours and ingredients to reflect such increasing consumer interest.

In the UK, brands are increasingly attracted to Kosher certification as it is seen as the one quality standard that offers the most inclusivity, depending on the underlying product. Segments showing increased demand include food-on-the-go and gluten-free.

For many companies, the decision to gain Kosher certification is linked to their US and Canada or Israel export plans. Further, they have to consider if their competitors are Kosher accredited. This is because if they are not, they may be missing out on an important marketing opportunity since the Kosher market is a growing one and latest estimates (from Lubicom Marketing Consulting) suggest the total market across all categories is worth \$305 billion plus.

Indeed, search facilities for Kosher products are available at major exhibitions like Anuga, SIAL and other international food shows.

All this demonstrates how Kosher Certification has moved from an old fashioned impression over to a modern and vibrant international professional certification service.



The largest accreditation body within the UK is KLBD - Kosher (Kashrut) division of the London Beth Din

Typical personnel in most major Kosher certifying authorities such as KLBD are technical experts and chemists: there to ensure there are no problematic ingredients or combinations of dairy and neutral products in the process.

Additionally, there are the rabbinic inspectors who have in depth knowledge of most modern food processes and the accompanying cleaning arrangements, and food technologists who produce and publish Kosher guides for the community, and maintain a large database to ensure any product changes are duly recorded.

KLBD Kosher is a top five worldwide certification agency, the largest in Europe and the oldest in the world. KLBD certifies over 1,300 food and drink manufacturers and traders in around 70 countries.

Next Steps

- Understand your customer's requirements / specification for Kosher certification. It may be that it is your customer's customer that has specified Kosher
- Chose a reputable Kosher agency.
- Nominate one person to champion the project and ensure there is one person who is responsible for Kosher across all the company's production facilities.
- Ensure all sensitive ingredients come with a Kosher certificate. Ideally all containers i.e. bags, IBCs etc. come with a Kosher logo / documentation. All Kosher requirements should be programed in to the company's purchasing system, thereby reducing potential errors from suppliers.
- Where there are non-Kosher ingredients, on site ensure that there is dedicated equipment or that batch processing is properly documented and that staff are fully trained and engaged with the process.
- Be sure to use the Kosher logo on the final product and use it throughout all your marketing communications.
- Ensure all new personnel are fully trained in the company's Kosher system.

For more information on KLBD Kosher Certification see:

www.klbdkosher.org

For more information on Kosher meat see:

www.shechita.org

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The Society thanks Russell J Brown MSc ACMA, Consultant to KLBD (Kosher Division of the London Beth Din), for kindly preparing this comprehensive document.