



Supervision on Glycerin

Many ingredients in the food industry are constantly changing, and there are numerous reasons for the ongoing search for alternative ingredients. One major factor is financial: manufacturers are continually seeking the least expensive options in order to improve profit margins. Another factor is changing consumer preferences. In recent years, there has been a growing trend toward foods that are less processed, more natural, and even organic. The food industry has responded by attempting to adapt to these demands.

At the same time, certain aspects of food production have remained unchanged for decades. Some ingredients, or byproducts of ingredients, are so deeply entrenched in the market that significant change seems unlikely in the near future. This reality is important to recognize, as consumers often base purchasing decisions on claims such as “all natural ingredients” or

“no animal or shellfish.” While these statements may be accurate, they do not in any way guarantee that a product is kosher.

SOURCES OF GLYCERIN

As discussed in previous articles, glycerin is one of the most common ingredients in industrial food production. It is essential in the manufacture of many products, including beverages, cereals, precooked foods, snacks, and sweets. Because glycerin is derived from oils and fats, there is a genuine concern that glycerin used in food products may originate from non-kosher animal sources.

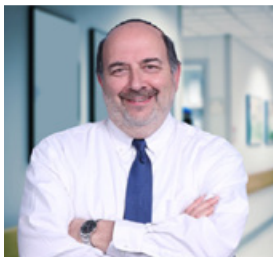
One might ask how common this concern truly is. While it is true that, over the years, a decreasing percentage of glycerin has been produced from animal sources, this reality is constantly shifting. For example, in China and other parts of the Far East, a significant amount of glycerin is still sourced from animal fats. As these regions become increasingly popular for food production due to lower material and labor costs, foods containing non-kosher glycerin may be imported into Western markets.

In other regions, such as South America, glycerin sources fluctuate based on market prices. When vegetable oils are cheaper, they are used as the source for glycerin; when animal fats are comparable in price or less expensive, they may be used instead. In such situations, confirming the kosher status of glycerin becomes especially critical.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LABELS

Another important issue is the common misunderstanding of food labels. As noted above, kosher consumers must be aware that labels

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such as “vegan” or “organic” do not necessarily mean kosher. This is particularly relevant with glycerin. Manufacturers may purchase vegetable-based glycerin to satisfy consumer demand, yet the product may still be entirely non-kosher.

This can occur when a glycerin producer manufactures glycerin from both animal and vegetable sources using the same equipment. Even if the vegetable oil itself is derived from a kosher-compatible source, glycerin processed on equipment also used for animal fats is not kosher.

KOSHER SUPERVISION

Because companies may have a strong incentive to purchase animal glycerin and present it as kosher—and because production facilities may involve non-kosher cross-contamination—glycerin is considered a highly sensitive ingredient that requires heightened supervision. OU Kosher has therefore made it its mission to closely oversee the production of kosher glycerin.

OU *mashgichim* (kosher supervisors) devote additional time during their inspections to ensure that companies purchase glycerin exclusively from approved sources. In addition to visually inspecting drums for kosher certification symbols, *mashgichim* review bills of lading and verify seals on bulk deliveries. Periodic accounting is also required to correlate the amount of glycerin purchased with the amount used. This level of accountability makes it far more difficult for companies to substitute cheaper, non-kosher glycerin.

BYPRODUCTS OF GLYCERIN AND FATS

When reviewing product labels, consumers

should be mindful not only of glycerin itself but also of other derivatives that result from the separation of fats and oils. Glycerin may appear on labels as E-422. In addition, glycerin derivatives often share the same root in their names, such as monoglycerides, diglycerides, and triglycerides.

Other ingredients that raise similar kashrut concerns include stearic acid and polysorbates, which likewise require reliable kosher supervision. ■

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