



Policy and Kosher Certification

To understand how kosher certification functions, one must first appreciate the complexities involved in granting kosher certification. Every professional kosher certification program is built upon three fundamental components:

- **Raw Ingredients:** A certifying agency must know every ingredient used in the product, determine its kosher status, and ensure that only approved ingredients are utilized.
- **Production Process:** The production process must be carefully evaluated. Is the product manufactured through a hot or cold process? Are dairy and pareve products produced on the same production line? Does the product undergo additional processing outside the certified

facility? Each of these factors can significantly affect the product's kosher status.

- **Supervision:** The certifying agency must determine the appropriate level of supervision required. Certain products demand continuous, full-time supervision because of the high potential for error or substitution. Others require only periodic inspections, depending on the facility, production process, and overall reliability of the kosher program.

Every kosher certification agency evaluates a facility based on these three pillars. Once these elements are properly integrated, a product can generally be certified. However, there is a fourth element that supersedes them all: **halachic policy**.

An essential aspect of Jewish life is reliance upon established halachic standards. Throughout every generation, we have looked to our rabbinic leaders to apply the eternal principles of the Torah to the realities of contemporary life. Kashrut is no exception. Modern kosher certification depends heavily upon advances in technology, chemistry, engineering, food science, and manufacturing. Professional kosher organizations invest significant resources to remain current in these fields, and as technology evolves, new halachic questions continually arise that require careful analysis and authoritative rulings.

OU Kosher embraces all of these principles. In addition, an international certification agency must also establish clear and consistent policy. The OU certifies more than 1.5 million products in over 100 countries. It is

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Licensed Investment Advisor
+972.54.320.8077

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difficult to find a Jewish community anywhere in the world that does not consume OU-certified products. Maintaining such a global certification program requires uniform policies that preserve both halachic integrity and professional consistency.

For example, the OU requires unannounced inspections of all certified facilities, regardless of the company's reputation or reliability. This policy reinforces the halachic principle of *mir-tat*—the understanding that a manufacturer remains aware that inspectors may arrive at any time and is therefore deterred from making unauthorized changes.

Another example is the OU's policy regarding *bitul* (nullification). Although certain situations may be halachically permissible after the fact (*b'dieved*), the OU does not establish certification programs that rely upon such circumstances. The organization's philosophy is that kosher certification should reflect the highest practical halachic standard. When a certification agency places its symbol on a product, it is effectively recommending that product to the kosher consumer.

Several weeks ago, a well-known rabbi published a series of articles discussing kosher certification in Israel. The articles were thoughtful and informative, and it is evident that the author is genuinely concerned with providing reliable kosher certification to the broader Israeli public. His central question was what level of certification should be offered as the national standard—one that reflects uncompromising halachic integrity without adopting unnecessary stringencies.

This objective closely mirrors the philosophy of the OU. Our goal is to provide **kashrut l'chatchilah**—an ideal standard of kosher certification that is firmly grounded in accepted halachic principles while making as many products as reasonably possible available to the public.

The author cited two examples where he argued that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate has adopted unnecessarily stringent policies that ultimately disadvantage consumers seeking a basic kosher standard.

The first concerns the certification of non-*Chalav Yisrael* liquid milk. For more than fifty years, the Chief Rabbinate has approved products containing non-*Chalav Yisrael* milk powder, but does not approve products made with non-*Chalav Yisrael* liquid milk. As a practical consequence, many recognized kosher products, such as Philadelphia Cream Cheese and Häagen-Dazs ice cream, cannot be sold as kosher under the Chief Rabbinate's certification in Israel.

The second example concerns the production of non-*mevushal* wine. The author argued that wineries owned and operated

by non-observant Jews should be eligible for kosher certification and that non-*Shomer Shabbat* Jews should be permitted to handle non-*mevushal* wine. While there are respected halachic authorities who have adopted more lenient positions on this issue, the traditional requirement has been that non-*mevushal* wine be handled only by Jews who observe Shabbat.

It seems these two cases are not comparable.

The question of non-*Chalav Yisrael* liquid milk is primarily one of certification policy. Although significant halachic discussion exists, kosher agencies throughout the world have developed sophisticated systems to certify both liquid milk and milk powder. These systems incorporate ingredient verification, government oversight, facility inspections, and carefully structured supervision programs.

The issue of non-*mevushal* wine, however, is fundamentally different. Wine production demands an extraordinary level of oversight and precision. Around the world, kosher wineries require extensive preparation, close cooperation with producers, and highly dedicated supervision throughout production.

Even according to authorities who permit non-observant Jews to handle wine under certain circumstances, numerous practical questions remain. What level of supervision would be required? Would this ruling apply equally

to all non-observant Jews, including those who openly reject fundamental principles of Judaism? How can a certifying agency ensure that no prohibited activity occurs on Shabbat? How can it guarantee that non-Jews do not handle the wine in a manner prohibited by halacha?

These are not merely theoretical questions; they are central to establishing a reliable and professionally administered kosher certification program.

For this reason, the longstanding policy requiring only *Shomer Shabbat* Jews to handle non-*mevushal* wine remains an essential component of professional kosher certification. It is a policy that provides clarity, consistency, and confidence for both certifying agencies and consumers, and it has therefore become the accepted standard throughout much of the kosher certification world.

Kosher certification organizations bear an enormous responsibility to the kosher consumer. Their obligation is not simply to determine whether an isolated product may be technically permissible, but to establish clear, consistent policies rooted in sound halachic principles that can be responsibly applied across the countless situations encountered in modern food production.

When certification agencies maintain these standards, consumers can purchase products with confidence, knowing that the kosher symbol represents not only technical compliance with halacha but also a carefully considered system of professional oversight, consistent policy, and unwavering commitment to the highest standards of kashrut. ■

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