



# OU Israel Kosher Food Service Standards

Over the past several weeks, we have discussed many of the challenges involved in maintaining reliable kashrut standards in restaurants, caterers, hotels, and other food-service establishments in Israel. To conclude this series, we would like to present the practical standards that OU Israel has established for the food-service establishments under its supervision.

Certifying a restaurant is very different from certifying a packaged product. A restaurant is a constantly changing environment. Ingredients arrive daily, employees come and go, menus change, deliveries are received throughout the day, and food is continuously being prepared and served. Effective kosher supervision therefore requires more than simply approving the ingredients and equipment. It requires a comprehensive system that maintains control from the moment an ingredient enters the establishment until the finished dish reaches the customer.

The following are some of the principal standards that form the basis of the OU Israel food-service program.

## 1. RECEIVING AND APPROVING RAW MATERIALS

To guarantee that the consumer receives a proper kosher meal, we must first be certain that every ingredient entering the final product is acceptable.

For this reason, only our *mashgichim* are authorized to approve products when they arrive at an OU-supervised food-service establishment. Deliveries may not simply be brought into storage rooms or food preparation areas. Before an ingredient enters the kitchen or storage area, the *mashgiach* must verify its kosher status and confirm that it is approved for use.

This creates an essential point of control at the entrance to the establishment. Even a well-supervised kitchen cannot maintain its kosher integrity if unapproved ingredients are allowed to enter freely.

## 2. MEAT AND FISH

Once an ingredient has been approved by the *mashgiach*, most products can be stored without significant additional concerns. Meat and fish, however, require greater precautions.

*Chazal* instituted special safeguards regarding meat and certain other foods because of the possibility of substitution or exchange. Consequently, OU Israel requires meat restaurants under its supervision to have full-time kosher supervision throughout their operating hours.

Areas containing unsealed meat or fish must remain under the control of the *mashgiach*. Before leaving the premises, the



*mashgiach* must ensure that these areas are properly locked, with the keys remaining under the control of authorized kosher personnel.

Alternatively, products may be secured with appropriate tamper-evident seals or *plumbas*—special kosher seals or clamps designed to demonstrate that the product has not been opened or substituted. Different sealing systems are used depending upon the type of product and container.

### 3. INSECT INSPECTION: VEGETABLES, RICE AND LEGUMES

The prohibition against consuming insects presents one of the most challenging areas of kosher food service. Leafy vegetables can contain insects that are extremely difficult to detect, even after ordinary washing.

Lettuce and other leafy greens must therefore come from approved *mehadrin* growers considered reliable for insect-controlled produce. Nevertheless, OU Israel policy does not rely upon the source alone. Greens must also undergo the prescribed washing, rinsing and inspection procedures under the supervision of our *mashgichim*.

Rice and legumes must similarly be inspected before use. Our *mashgichim* check them using a light box and screen to make the inspection as effective as possible. After inspection, the grains and legumes are stored in cold storage until they are required for use.

Certain varieties of leafy vegetables present such persistent infestation problems that they are not permitted for use in OU-supervised establishments when we cannot be

sufficiently confident that they can be properly cleaned and inspected.

### 4. MEAT AND POULTRY STANDARDS

All chicken served in OU Israel establishments must originate from OU-certified slaughterhouses or from slaughterhouses that have been reviewed and specifically approved by OU Kosher personnel.

All beef and lamb used in our establishments must meet **Chalak Beit Yosef** standards, thereby accommodating the requirements accepted by both Sephardic and Ashkenazic consumers.

In accordance with OU Kosher policy and the standards commonly maintained by major kosher certifications internationally, OU-certified food-service establishments do not serve meat from the hindquarters.

Internal organs and other meats requiring additional *kashering* procedures must be prepared under the direct responsibility of an OU *mashgiach* or a specifically designated *Ne'eman Kashrut*. This ensures that the special requirements associated with these products are properly carried out before they enter normal kitchen production.

### 5. BISHUL YISRAEL

Although we are privileged to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, many restaurants and commercial kitchens employ non-Jewish workers. This creates a practical challenge regarding *Bishul Yisrael*.

OU Israel's food-service standards are designed to satisfy not only the Ashkenazic approach to *Bishul Yisrael*, but also the strict standard associated with the *Beit Yosef* and

accepted by Sephardic communities.

Accordingly, non-Jewish employees are not permitted to perform cooking functions in the designated cooking areas. They may work in other designated areas and perform permitted stages of food preparation, but the actual cooking process remains under Jewish control.

As a result, OU-supervised restaurants and caterers are operated as *Bishul Yisrael* establishments according to both Ashkenazic and Sephardic standards.

### 6. MITZVOT HATELUYOT BA'ARETZ

Food service in Israel presents an additional area of responsibility that does not generally exist in kosher establishments outside the country: the *mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz*, the agricultural mitzvot unique to produce grown in the Land of Israel.

Agricultural produce must therefore originate from properly certified suppliers operating according to the required *mehadrin* standards.

Produce may only be accepted after the *mashgiach* verifies that the products delivered correspond to those listed on the delivery documentation and that the documentation bears the appropriate stamp and signature of the *mehadrin mashgiach*.

This system allows the restaurant's *mashgiach* to maintain a chain of kosher accountability from the produce supplier until the

ingredient enters the kitchen.

### 7. WINE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Wine and alcoholic beverages require particular attention in a kosher food-service environment.

All alcoholic beverages served in OU establishments must be reviewed and approved by senior OU Kosher personnel. This includes products such as rum, beer, bourbon, tequila and other spirits. OU policy prohibits whiskies aged in sherry or other wine casks for use in its supervised establishments.

Wine presents an additional concern because of the special *halachot* governing *stam yeinam*. As a general food-service policy, OU Kosher approves **only mevushal wine**, thereby avoiding many of the complications that can arise when wine is handled in a restaurant environment.

In Israel, however, non-*mevushal* wine is considerably more common, and there are situations in which an establishment strongly wishes to serve it. When an exception is approved, strict controls are required: only the *mashgiach* may handle and pour the non-*mevushal* wine for customers.

### 8. VERIFYING MASHGIACH ATTENDANCE

A kosher program is only as effective as its implementation. Establishing standards on paper is insufficient if there is no reliable method of confirming that the required supervision is present.

To ensure that our *mashgichim* are on site during the required hours, they must clock in and out through a monitored attendance system. The OU Israel Kashrut office can compare the *mashgiach's* recorded hours with the establishment's operating and employee hours.

This provides an additional layer of accountability and allows us to verify that

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whenever kitchen activity requiring kosher supervision is taking place, the required *mashgiach* is present.

## 9. UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS AND ONGOING OVERSIGHT

Even a restaurant with an experienced *mashgiach* requires outside oversight. Familiarity and routine can sometimes cause procedures to become less precise over time.

OU Israel therefore employs dedicated kashrut supervisory personnel who conduct **unannounced inspections** of OU-certified restaurants and food-service establishments, generally approximately once a week. These visits allow us to observe the establishment under normal operating conditions and verify that the required procedures are being followed.

In addition, rabbinic personnel from the OU Israel Kashrut offices regularly visit supervised establishments. This creates multiple layers of oversight: the on-site *mashgiach*, the visiting supervisor, and the senior rabbinic staff responsible for the overall kosher program.

## A FINAL WORD

We certainly recommend and stand behind the establishments operating under OU Israel supervision. At the same time, we recognize that questions surrounding restaurant kashrut can be sensitive, particularly when they arise in connection with family *simchas*, communal events, or gatherings involving people who follow different kosher standards.

It is important to emphasize that there are other kosher certifications in Israel that maintain strong and responsible standards as well. Differences between certifications do not necessarily mean that one establishment is "kosher" and another is "not kosher." Often, they reflect different halachic policies, levels of supervision, or standards adopted for

particular communities.

When differences in practice or personal standards have the potential to create tension within a family or community, the proper approach is to consult a trusted Rav who understands both the halachic issues and the circumstances involved.

The purpose of this series has therefore not been to create suspicion regarding eating out in Israel. Quite the opposite. Our goal has been to give consumers a better understanding of what takes place behind the scenes and why reliable food establishment supervision requires such an extensive system.

Consumer awareness itself can have a tremendous positive effect on kosher standards. When customers ask informed questions, look for reliable supervision, and demonstrate that kashrut genuinely matters to them, restaurant owners and food-service operators take notice.

Ultimately, better education creates better expectations, and better expectations encourage higher standards. We hope that greater knowledge and awareness will continue to strengthen the quality of kosher food service throughout *Eretz Yisrael* ■

## Kashrut Questions in Israel?

Call or Whatsapp Rabbi Friedman at  
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