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Producción de Carne Kasher: Shechita Flies South



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From time immemorial, no matter where in the far-flung Diaspora, the presence of a Jewish community has always meant that there was *shechita* in proximity. The position of community *shochet* was one of a *klei kodesh* and the *shochtim* of a community were subject to the supreme jurisdiction of the local *rav* and/or Beis Din.

Here, in the U.S., it was no different. On November 15, 1660, a man named Asser (Asher) Levy acquired a license to serve as the first kosher butcher in the small Dutch-controlled hamlet of Nieuw Amsterdam – now better known as New York City.¹ Ever since, maintaining a reliable supply of kosher beef has been an integral part of Jewish communal life in the U.S. Previous *Kashrus Kurrents* articles have offered a glimpse into the challenges *shechita* has faced on these shores and the changes to the way kosher meat is supplied to our communities.²

Following in Israel's Footsteps

One of the dramatic changes on the American kosher meat landscape is the phenomenon of Mehadrin kosher meat being imported from various countries in Latin America.

Shechita in South America for export has a long history. As early as the mid-1930s, after the Nazis *y'sh* outlawed *shechita* in Germany, frozen kosher meat was imported from Uruguay and Argentina.³ While that market was tragically short-lived, Israel began importing beef from South America since shortly after its founding in 1948.

Palestine was a land of limited pastures and minimal livestock. Its location on the Mediterranean coast, with its long hot summers and sparse reservoirs, severely curtailed local meat production. With the steady influx of European immigrants, demand for beef soared. Before 1948,

¹ "Keeping Kosher in 17th Century New York City," Tenement Museum, accessed December 29, 2023, <https://www.tenement.org/blog/meet-assar-levy-new-yorks-first-kosher-butcher/>.

² See these excellent articles by Rabbi Moshe T. Schuchman: "A Cut Above: Shechita in the Crosshairs, Again," *Kashrus Kurrents*, Fall 2012, <https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/548/a-cut-above-shechita-in-the-crosshairs-again/> and "Kosher Meat in the Marketplace," *Kashrus Kurrents*, Fall 2016, <https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/3471/kosher-meat-in-the-marketplace/>.

³ I.M. Levinger, *Shechita: Religious and Historical Research on the Jewish Method of Slaughter, and Medical Aspects of Shechita (Part II of "Eduf Ne' emana)*, ed. Michael L. and Eli Munk (Brooklyn: Gur Aryeh, Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship; distributed by Feldheim, Jerusalem, New York, 1976).

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A C I D S



IN DIGESTION



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When my father *z"l* went to pharmacy school at George Washington University, his course of study had a heavy concentration of chemistry. His background in chemistry proved extremely useful in his forty-year career as an examiner in the U.S. Patent Office. On his workbench, he had shoe boxes with all his pharmacological paraphernalia: Bunsen burners, beakers, and little vials of litmus paper. As a child, I remember my fascination with watching the red litmus paper turn blue when dipped into a base and the blue litmus paper turn red when dipped into an acid. These were *literal* litmus tests, a term which over time has crept into everyday language to denote a means of determining an outcome.

Although the world of industrial kashrus may not require the deep analysis found in chemistry textbooks, it behooves kashrus administrators and mashgichim to have a working knowledge of chemical compositions and formulations. Solid knowledge of food chemistry and technical know-how is essential to arriving at the correct halachic conclusions.

To start our journey, we need to define some fundamental terms: *acids*, *bases*, and *pH*. Scientifically, an *acid* is a substance that can *donate* a hydrogen ion to another substance; a *base* is a substance that can *accept* a hydrogen ion. As taste descriptors, an acid is "tart or sour" while a base is "bitter and soapy."

How does a litmus paper determine the acidity or baseness of a product? Incredibly, it is the acid or base itself which reacts with the dye in the paper. The natural blue dye turning red in the presence of an acid and the natural red dye turning blue in the presence of a base are caused by hydrogen exchange – hence, the name *pH*: *potential of hydrogen*. A pH of 1 through 6 indicates acidity, a pH of 7 is neutral, while a pH of 8 to 14 indicates a product is basic (see Fig. 1).

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For Good Measure:

Baking with Gluten-Free Blends, Whole Wheat Flour, Sourdough and at Challah Bakes



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Once upon a time, baking a loaf of bread was simple. Today, when gluten-free blends and processed whole wheat flour are found in many homes, that is no longer the case. Baking with sourdough starters and group baking at “challah bakes” have also become popular. The halachos involved are complex and bear examination.

Let’s begin with a review of the measurements necessary for mitzvos related to regular wheat flour.¹

Mitzvos Involving Wheat Flour

- Separating Challah (*hafrashas challah*) Without a Bracha – One should separate challah without a bracha when kneading a dough that contains at least 8 2/3 cups of wheat flour (on average 2.6 lbs.).²
- Separating Challah With a Bracha – There are differences of opinion as to how much flour is needed to recite a bracha. Some individuals do so when kneading at least 12 1/4 cups of flour (slightly more than 3 2/3 lbs.).³ Others only do so when kneading at least 5 lbs. of flour⁴ (about 16 1/2 cups of flour). When being *mafrish*, *l’chatchila* one pulls off a *kezayis* of dough.⁵
- *Birkas Hamazon* – One must recite *Birkas Hamazon* if he eats a *kezayis* of bread *b’kedei achilas pras*, meaning within a four-minute timespan.⁶ A *kezayis* is 0.95 fl. oz. (slightly less than 1 fl. oz.) or 28 ml.⁷
- Shabbos and Yom Tov – At each *seudah*, one should eat the volume of a *k’beitza v’yoser* (literally, more than an egg; 2.0 fl. oz. or 59 ml.) of challah, matzah, or any *Hamotzi* product.⁸ If this is too difficult, one *kezayis* will suffice. Unless a *k’beitza* of bread is intended to be consumed, one should wash without a bracha.⁹ Either way, at least one *kezayis* of a *Hamotzi* product must be eaten *b’kedei achilas pras*.

Separating Challah with Oat Flour

When using oat flour, one would use the same cup measurement as listed above by wheat flour. However, since oat flour is lighter (i.e., less

dense) per cup than wheat flour,¹⁰ if measuring by weight one would be *mafrish* without a bracha for 1.8 lbs. and with a bracha for 3.75 lbs.¹¹

Gluten-Free Blends

- Separating Challah – *Hafrashas challah* is not performed on gluten-free blends that have no *dagan* content. If the gluten-free blend contains a mixture of *dagan* (e.g., gluten-free oat flour¹²) and other *non-dagan* flours,¹³ one counts only the content of the *dagan* flour in order to take challah with a bracha. Other “*non-dagan* flours” – such as tapioca starch, buckwheat, sorghum and almond flours mixed with *dagan* flour – only count towards the necessary *shiur* to be *mafrish* without a bracha.
- *Bracha Rishona* – The *bracha rishona* on bread that contains gluten-free flour with no *dagan* content is *Shehakol*.¹⁴ If the blend contains *dagan* (e.g., oat flour), the bracha is *Hamotzi* (for cake it’s *Mezonos*) if *dagan* is added for taste. How does one know? If *dagan* is more than 25% of the entire product, it is certainly added for taste. If under 15%, it is not added for taste but rather as a binder – so the “other” flours are the *ikker* and the bracha is *Shehakol*. If between 15-25%, one must ask the baker about his intent in using *dagan*.¹⁵
- *Birkas Hamazon* and *Seudas Shabbos* – If there is no *dagan* content in the gluten-free blend, one cannot use such rolls for *lechem mishneh* or be *yotzei Seudas Shabbos*¹⁶ and one recites *Borei Nefashos*. If there is at least 51% *dagan*, one recites *Birkas Hamazon* (or *Al Hamichya*) after consuming a *kezayis* of the bread (or cake) *b’kedei achilas pras*.¹⁷ One can be *yotzei Seudas Shabbos* and use these rolls for *lechem mishneh*.
- If *dagan* is less than half of the bread, one must calculate the percentage of *dagan* within the different flours to determine whether *Birkas Hamazon* is recited. If, for example, one consumes a bread that contains 35% gluten-free oat flour, 25% tapioca starch, 25%

1 When we refer to *dagan*, we mean flour made from *chameishes minei dagan* – wheat, barley, spelt, rye or oats. For additional halachos relating to *hafrashas challah* and *Seudas Shabbos* addressed in earlier issues of *Kashrus Kurrents*, see *star-k.org*.

2 One is not *mafrish challah* when kneading less than this amount. Note halachic measurements are by volume (e.g., cups), not weight – see *Pischei Teshuva Y.D.* 98:2. The weight of flour measured by “cup” can be more or less based on sifting, settling and moisture content. Measuring by weight may be a simpler method if one knows the density. Our conversions from cups to pounds apply to domestic flour and are averages.

3 See *Shiurei Torah* (3:3) where Rav Avrohom Chaim Naeh says a bracha can be recited with 2,500 cc (10.5 cups).

4 See *Shiurin Shel Torah (Shiurei Hamitzvos 20)* where the Chazon Ish says 4,320 cc (18 1/4 cups).

5 *Bedi’eved* a small piece of dough is enough.

6 See *Aruch Hashulchan O.C.* 202:8 and *Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchoso* (54:30). Ideally, it should be eaten in less than 3 minutes (*Igros Moshe O.C.* 4:41). The same measurement is used for *bracha achrona* when eating other food.

7 See *M.B.* 486:1 that a *kezayis* is half a *beitza* (including the shell). Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt”l* told Rav Moshe Heinemann *shlit”a* that a *beitza* is the size of a large egg, which is 1.9 fl. oz. (56 ml). (In previous issues of *Kashrus Kurrents*, we indicated a larger *shiur* for a *kezayis*.) See also *Shiurin Shel Torah* (ibid. 21 and 24) that *l’chatchila* it is about 1.1 fl. oz. (33 ml). It’s important to use an accurate measuring device. “1 fl. oz.” plastic schnaps cups are often larger than 1 fl. oz. – be extra careful when measuring *shiurim* in other halachic situations (e.g., Yom Kippur, Pesach).

8 *M.B.* 291:2.

9 *Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 158:2. See *Igros Moshe* (O.C. 4:41) who disagrees.

10 Whole oats are even less dense, so by weight the amount would be slightly lower. Spelt flour has measurements similar to wheat flour.

11 According to the opinions that require 5 lbs. of wheat flour.

12 One should be *mafrish challah* without a bracha on dough made from Molino gluten-free wheat flour (which consists of wheat starch and other flours). This is true even when kneading an amount of dough that normally requires a bracha. This *safek* is because the Italian manufacturer began the process by making a dough (in order to separate out the gluten). One recites *Hamotzi* on bread baked with this flour.

13 However, rice flour mixed with *dagan* flour may count towards a *shiur* under certain conditions - see *Shulchan Aruch Y.D.* 324:9 and *Shach* 17. For mixtures of different *dagan* flours, see *Shulchan Aruch Y.D.* 324:2.

14 Rice flour and brown rice flour are *Mezonos* and *Borei Nefashos*. If blended with *dagan*, see *Biur Halacha* 208:9.

15 The percentages in this paragraph are the *psak* of Rav Heinemann based on responses from manufacturers regarding intent and percentages by weight. Practically, it is difficult for a consumer to determine this information. One should consult the agency certifying the product.

16 Regarding *Kiddush b’makom seudah* for someone who cannot eat any *dagan*, see *Maaseh Ish* (vol. 5, pg. 91).

17 Rabbi Yisroel Belsky *zt”l* brought a *rayah* to this from *M.B.* 453:14, where it says if there is a majority of *dagan*, it is considered as completely *dagan*.



millet flour and 15% almond flour,¹⁸ since it is only $\frac{1}{3}$ *dagan*, one should eat three *kezaisim* of it (i.e., to reach a *kezayis* of oat flour) *b'kedei achilas pras* to fulfill his obligation of Seudas Shabbos and recite *Birkas Hamazon*.¹⁹

The above halacha illustrates that some gluten-free blends labeled *Hamotzi* possibly do not contain enough oat flour to properly fulfill the obligation of Seudas Shabbos or to recite *Birkas Hamazon*. One must consult the certifying agency or *rav* to confirm that there is a high enough percentage of *chameishes minei dagan*.

Whole Wheat Flour

Bran that was never sifted out is included when calculating the amount of whole wheat flour for *hafrashas challah*, *Birkas Hamazon*, *bracha achrona* and Seudas Shabbos. According to standard milling protocol, the bran is sifted out to produce pristine white flour and subsequently added back to produce whole wheat flour. With respect to *hafrashas challah*, *Machzeh Eliyahu*²⁰ says that the bran that is removed and added back is considered a separate ingredient, so one does not count it. *Teshuvos V'hanhagos*, however, says one can include it.²¹ *Rav Moshe Heinemann shlit"a paskens* that if one kneads with 5 lbs. of store-bought whole wheat flour, one can recite a bracha because it still has the minimum *shiur* ($3\frac{2}{3}$ lbs.) of white flour according to *Rav Avrohom Chaim Naeh*.²²

This *machlokes* also applies to *Birkas Hamazon*, *bracha acharona* and Seudas Shabbos. According to *Machzeh Eliyahu*, the bran would not count towards the *shiur* (e.g., to reach a *kezayis*), and according to *Teshuvos V'hanhagos*, it would. According to all opinions, the *bracha rishona* is either *Hamotzi* (on bread) or *Mezonos* (on cake).

Baking With Sourdough

Sourdough bread is primarily baked with wheat flour and therefore one recites *Hamotzi* and *Birkas Hamazon*; loaves may be used for *lechem mishneh*. There are many ways to make sourdough bread and *hafrashas challah* for each will depend on the factors addressed above.

As an example, if making a dough with each loaf weighing 500 grams and the starter weighing 100 grams (which adds an additional 50 grams of flour), then for one or two loaves: there is no obligation to be *mafrish*. For

three loaves: be *mafrish* without a bracha. For four loaves: it depends on the *machlokes* cited above.²³ For five or more loaves: be *mafrish* with a bracha.²⁴

When kneading a *shiur* of dough (e.g., 2,750 grams to make five loaves) in one bowl, one is simply *mafrish* from the entire batch.

However, if one prepares five loaves by kneading five separate doughs in five different bowls, each consisting of 500 grams of flour plus starter, one must be *mitztaref* the loaves (bring them together) to be obligated in *hafrashas challah*. To do this, all the doughs should be removed from the bowls as indicated below. Either of the following methods is acceptable:

- ▶ Place the doughs on a large piece of parchment paper or a plastic tablecloth. Cover them with the plastic or paper so as to encase all the doughs, thereby constituting a single "*kli*" (vessel). Be *mafrish* from one of the doughs.
- ▶ Place the doughs on a table and push them together, allowing them to bond well enough so that if one is pulled from the other, a chunk is pulled off from the rest. Alternatively, place the doughs – preferably touching – into one vessel. If the dough rises above the top, cover it. Be *mafrish* from any part of the dough.²⁵

How to Be Mafrish From Dough That Will Be Shared with Others

- ▶ **At challah bakes** – If many people are given a piece of dough²⁶ and no one has a "*shiur*," there is no obligation to take challah.²⁷ To recite a bracha at a challah bake we recommend the following: Each participant takes a piece of dough from a large batch that was kneaded, except for one individual who takes an amount made with 5 lbs. of flour.²⁸ She recites the bracha out loud on behalf of all present, at which time she alone is *mafrish challah* from her batch. Since she has a full *shiur*, this *hafrasha* works for all the participants who wish to be included. She should burn the dough she was *mafrish* and bake the batch to serve at home.
- ▶ **When baking for *Mishloach Manos*** – If one kneads a large batch of dough with the intention of distributing the baked goods (e.g., *challo*s to neighbors), one is *mafrish challah* without a bracha.²⁹ To recite a bracha, she must retain dough for consumption at her home³⁰ made from at least $3\frac{2}{3}$ lbs. of flour.³¹ ☆

18 Percentages are of the flour content (i.e., water is not part of the calculation). As discussed above, the *bracha rishona* on this bread is *Hamotzi*.

19 See *M.B.* 208:47 regarding *bracha achrona* if one did not eat three *kezaisim* in this case. Also see *M.B.* 208:48 that with sugar content, less *kezaisim* are necessary because the *minhag ha'olam* is to count the sugar (a *tavlin*). Thus for a single *kezayis* of cake that combines flour and sugar, one is permitted to recite *Al Hamichya*. (See *Igros Moshe* O.C. 1:71 who disagrees.)

20 See *cheilek 3 simanim 75-81* based on the Mishna in *Challah* (2:6).

21 See *cheilek 3 siman 71* – Since the bran is removed with intent to put it back in, and since nowadays it is common to eat bran products.

22 We are *mitztaref* this opinion with the *Teshuvos V'hanhagos*.

23 See different opinions cited in "Mitzvos Involving Wheat Flour: Separating Challah With a Bracha," above.

24 These numbers may differ if a 50- or 150-gram starter, whole wheat flour or other grains were used. Calculations should be based on the discussions above.

25 If five doughs that are individually less than the *shiur* are in five different bowls on a table or counter, they are not considered *mitztaref* for reciting a bracha. Above is based on *Biur Halacha* 457:1, *Leket Haomer* 6:1 thru 5 (and fn 14) and *Piskei Teshuvos* O.C. 457:8 (and fn 50 and 52).

26 This applies even if regular wheat dough is used.

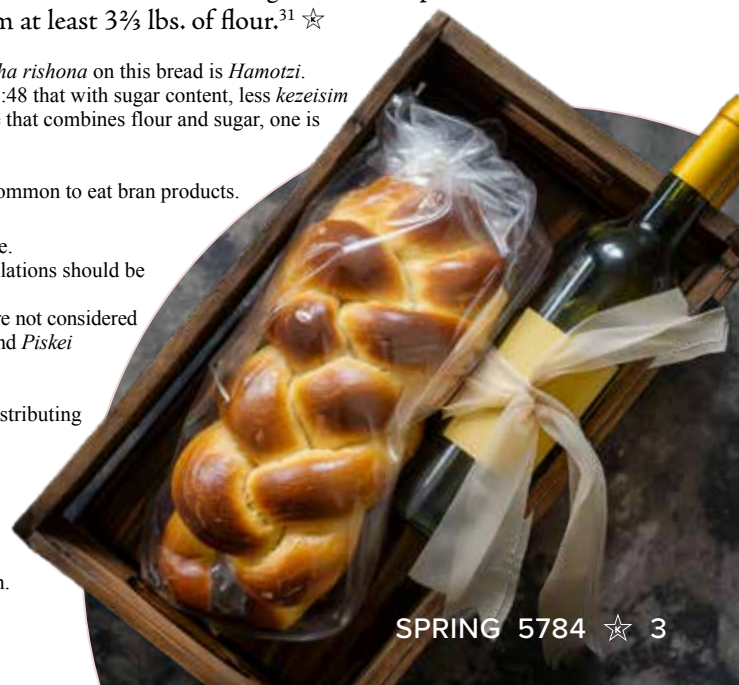
27 *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 326:2. Reciting a bracha in such cases is a *bracha l'vatula*. The same applies when distributing dough to children in school.

28 Or at least $3\frac{2}{3}$ lbs. according to *Rav Naeh*. (Oat flour would require less, as noted above.)

29 *Minchas Yitzchok* 10:102. See however *Kovetz Halachos (Purim 15:40)* who says a bracha is recited if the intent is to give it out after it is baked (e.g., for *Mishloach Manos*).

30 A bracha can also be recited if a "*shiur*" of flour was used to bake challah that will be eaten by many individuals at a large seuda (e.g., a Purim seudah or a Sheva Brachos) at her home or someone else's home.

31 We are *mitztaref* the opinions (1) that after it is baked it is not called dividing and (2) the *shiur* of *Rav Naeh*.



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Jewish cattle dealers imported beef from Europe through land routes to Palestine to supplement the local supply. After the War of Independence, this avenue of import effectively closed.⁴ Importing kosher beef from South America proved to be the perfect solution to meet the growing demand.

Today, Israel is the fourth largest consumer per capita of beef in the world – 195 lbs. per person, just behind the U.S., Australia and Argentina.⁵ Beef imported from Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, Poland and France currently constitutes 60% of Israel's meat supply.

The “Meat Law” and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel

According to an Israeli law called the *Chok Habasar* (the Meat Law), Israeli meat imports must not only be kosher but be certified by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel (the Rabbanut Harashit). There is an entire division of the Rabbinate dedicated to imported *shechita*: Machleket Shechitat Chutz La'aretz, or Shach"al. The responsibilities of Shach"al are vast and include:

- setting standards for slaughterhouses and kosher staff
- conducting facility audits
- administering tests for *shochtim* and *bodkim*
- staffing and verifying each team sent to *shechita* sites outside of Israel
- overseeing the more than forty facilities conducting export *shechita*

Over the course of the seventy years that Israel has engaged in the import of South American *shechita*, a fully developed system of standards has arisen in the South American *shechita* world, based largely on the requirements of the Rabbanut Harashit.⁶

U.S. Meat Tradeoff: Quality vs. Cost

While beef in the U.S. is one of the highest quality meat products in the world, even non-kosher meat is more expensive here than imported beef. Kosher meat producers have the added challenge of finding domestic plants that are small enough to accommodate the kosher slaughter process. Consolidation of smaller slaughterhouses over the years has resulted in severely limited options for kosher beef companies.

A recent post on *modernfarmer.com* noted, “Market share for the country's four biggest meat-packing companies – Tyson, JBS, Cargill and Marfrig – has skyrocketed to 85 percent today from 25 percent in 1977. The Big Four, as they're commonly known, now have plants that can process more than 5,000 head of cattle a day. . . . Unable to compete, more than half of the country's small and midsize processors have shuttered operations in the past 20 years alone.”⁷

This trend has adversely affected the price of kosher beef, since the largest plants are far too fast and complex for a kosher *shechita*, and the few remaining plants willing to process kosher can charge higher prices since they have less competition. To rely on domestic beef alone would mean that many kosher consumers in the U.S. would rarely, if ever, eat kosher beef.

Shechita in Mexico and South America: The Plusses and Minuses

There are two main regions in Latin America that export significant amounts of kosher beef to the U.S. – Mexico and South America.

Shechita in Mexico for the U.S. market is generally in smaller plants set up by American companies and *hashgachos* working in tandem with Mexican partners.

This means that the kashrus systems are controlled exclusively by the U.S. *hashgachos* with accepted norms and standards.

Mexican beef can be delivered by truck, fresh to the kosher markets in the U.S. within days or a week of packaging. Additionally, Mexican beef can be sent bone-in, allowing for bone-in rib steaks and flanken, to which the U.S. consumer is accustomed. On the other hand, Mexican beef usually is produced from heat-resistant breeds, which tend to be leaner and tougher than tasty corn-fed American beef. Mexico is not approved for export to Israel at this time.

South American kosher beef, imported to the U.S. from Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, is a whole different animal, quite literally. The animals are from the same type of European breeds grown in the U.S. and have a comparable, although somewhat inferior, quality profile. This has an advantage – due to the differences in how South American cattle are raised, the *glatt* kosher percentages they yield are often much higher than from animals in the U.S.⁸

Common elements in virtually all South American *shechitos* for export today include:

- *Shechita Munachas* – The animal lies on its back during the *shechita*, restrained in a rotating *shechita* box. This allows the *shochet* to access the animal from the most optimal direction.
- *Bodek Sakinim* – Since the *shechitos* are conducted at a high speed, a separate *shochet* checks the knives before and after *shechita* to allow for a careful review of the *chalafim*.
- *Bodek Veshet* – To ensure that each animal is *shechted* correctly, a dedicated *mashgiach* checks each *shechita* to confirm its kashrus, along with the *shochet*.

4 Efrat Gilad, “Settler Histories and Sustainable Meats, History Workshop, October 25, 2021, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/migration/settler-histories-and-sustainable-meats/>.

5 Niall McCarthy, “The Countries That Eat the Most Meat,” Statista, May 5, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/3707/the-countries-that-eat-the-most-meat/>.

6 Until the early 1990s, importing meat to Israel was in the hands of the Government Trade Administration, which only imported kosher meat. Generally, this meat was frozen prior to being soaked and salted, and relied on various leniencies to soak and salt this meat within three days of defrosting (as opposed to the normal requirement of kashering within three days of slaughter).

Since the passing of the *Chok Habasar* in 1993, private companies compete for market share; now they not only kasher their meat in advance, but also separate out the *cholak* or Beit Yosef meat for consumers who demand Mehadrin standards. Often, their teams, which by law must be approved by the Chief Rabbinate, are also approved by one of the numerous Badatz-type kashrus organizations who co-certify the *cholak* meat for the Mehadrin markets.

This development changed the realities for communities in Israel who require *cholak* meat, and made beef truly affordable for the first time in Israel's history. Until then, communities that required Mehadrin had to make do with chicken, turkey and plant-based meats for their daily proteins, unless they had the means to afford beef. Beef used to be a treat for Shabbos, and in many Chareidi households, often served only on Yom Tov.

7 Eric J. Wallace, “Small Processors Face Big Obstacles in Ultra-Consolidated Meat-Packing Industry,” *Modern Farmer*, December 19, 2023, <https://modernfarmer.com/2023/12/small-processors-big-obstacles/>.

8 In general, cattle in the U.S. are fattened for longer periods to produce higher weight animals. This is not the practice in South America, resulting in cattle that are healthier and more likely to pass kosher inspection.



- *Bodek Beis Hakosos V'Keres* – Due to a higher and broader incidence of *treifos* on the intestines of animals raised in South America, a highly trained *bodek* checks each *beis hakosos* and *keres* for any anomalies.
- Automated Soak and Salt Systems – With large quantities of kosher meat to kasher, South American plants are required to install automated systems for *shriya* (soaking), *melicha* (salting) and *hadacha* (rinsing).
- Housing and Board – *Shochtim* and *mashgichim* are provided with dormitory facilities complete with a *beis midrash* and kitchen facilities since they often stay for months during the *shechita* seasons. *Minyanim* and *shiurim* are taken care of in a manner that allows them to fulfill their kashrus responsibilities while maintaining their *sedorim* and *shiurim* during long overseas trips.

Tailoring South American Shechitos for U.S. Markets

Since the established *shechitos* in South America are primarily destined for the Israeli market, the kosher requirements are tailored to Israeli standards. American *shechitos* have a bit of work managing the expectations of plants importing to the U.S. Here are some of the differences:

► *Treifos* and Kosher Percentages

Israeli *shechitos* use two grades of kosher – *chalak* and regular kosher. *Chalak*, the more stringent of the two, means that the animal was completely free of lung adhesions (*sirchos*).⁹ Regular kosher in Israel indicates the use of all leniencies acceptable to both the Beit Yosef and the Rama.¹⁰

In contrast, U.S. *shechitos* grade animals as Beit Yosef and “industry” *glatt*.¹¹ Beit Yosef for U.S. *shechitos* is similar to Israel; industry *glatt* means that the animal only had loose *sirchos* that were easily removed.¹² These stricter standards mean that the overall percentage of kosher meat bound for the U.S. is lower

than what is produced for export to Israel. This presents a challenge for South American producers because a stand-alone North American *shechita* is less profitable.

► *Nikkur*

In the U.S. and most European countries, the hindquarters are not processed for kosher use due to the presence of *cheilev* – forbidden fats. These portions are sold to the non-kosher markets.

By contrast, the forequarters, which contain various blood arteries, blood veins, glands, membranes and tendons, require intensive processing for kosher use. According to European custom – which European Jews brought with them to these shores – these components must be skillfully removed by a trained expert before the meat can be *kashered* (i.e., soaked and salted). The removal of forbidden fats (or deveining) is referred to as *traiboring* in Yiddish and *nikkur* in Hebrew. The skilled craftsman is known as a *menaker*.

The *minhag Eretz Yisroel* regarding *nikkur* follows the position of the *Mechaber*, which is that the meat needs to be merely cut and salted and not deveined. While some Ashkenazi *hechsherim* in Israel have introduced some basic *nikkur* over the years, American standard *nikkur* is far more extensive and costly.¹³ *Shechitos* for the U.S. market have this added challenge which needs to be carefully overseen, as it is uncommon in South America.

The Challenges in Overseeing Distant Shechitos

Managing a *shechita* in remote locations brings many challenges. *Rabbanim machshirim* need not only be experts in the relevant halachos but also be capable of ensuring sufficient and well-trained kashrus personnel. The quality of the kashrus is directly dependent on the quality of the *shochtim* and *mashgichim* who are on site. For a *hechsher* to ensure that standards are being met, *rabbanim machshirim* need to dedicate significant time and effort not only to travel to the facilities to set up and review the

shechita teams, but also to develop relationships to ensure that all kashrus-related issues are resolved in a manner consistent with the expectations of the *rav hamachshir*.

For *shechitos* near communities like Buenos Aires which have a vibrant Torah presence, replacing staff due to illness or other emergencies is less of a challenge than in remote *shechitos* in the Argentinian hinterlands, which could be a twelve-hour drive from the closest kehillah. The same is true for those in Uruguay or Brazil.

STAR-K Meat Policy and Assurance

All meat in STAR-K certified Mehadrin products must meet the standards and guidelines of STAR-K’s Rabbinic Administrator, Rabbi Moshe Heinemann *shlit”a*. STAR-K’s established policy is not to use any new meat or poultry product until Rav Heinemann has personally visited the plant – or sent a representative of his choosing – and approved the item for use.

With the advent of *shechita* south of the border, STAR-K *rabbanim* now travel many times during the year to difficult-to-reach locations to plan and oversee STAR-K *shechitos*. They also regularly visit STAR-K certified facilities south of the border to help them comply with American kashrus standards and to provide their staff with the necessary guidance to ensure the integrity of our meat certification.

Consumers can be assured that when they purchase a STAR-K certified meat product, a highly trained *rav* from STAR-K has carefully reviewed the actual *shechita* before it was approved for use. ☆

⁹ See *Y.D.* 39. The Beit Yosef does not permit the removal of any lung adhesions that would otherwise cause an animal to be considered non-kosher, while the Rama allows for the removal of such adhesions. In contrast, Beit Yosef allows lung adhesions on the flanks of the animal, while the Rama forbids these adhesions.

¹⁰ This is the custom of Moroccan Jewry which as part of Sephardic tradition accepted the rulings of the Beit Yosef. When the Rosh was exiled from Germany to Castile in Spain, his leniencies were accepted there as well. When the Castilian Jews were exiled in 1492, they brought these customs with them to Morocco.

¹¹ Both *glatt* and *chalak* mean smooth.

¹² Meat with firmly attached *sirchos* cannot be called *glatt*.

¹³ For more details on *nikkur*, see Rabbi Moshe Heinemann, “Making the Cut: Assuring That Glatt Really Means Kosher,” *Kashrus Kurrents*, Winter 2016, <https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/3473/making-the-cut-assuring-that-glatt-really-means-kosher/>.

Potassium hydroxide is a good example of a base. As mentioned above, a base is soapy and bitter. Putting enough potassium hydroxide into water to raise the pH over 11 is a food grade *davar hapogem* according to STAR-K Rabbinic Administrator Rabbi Moshe Heinemann *shlit"á*. The benefit to food manufacturers is that it fulfills the requirements of *pegima* (off-taste) while not compromising the food grade properties of the water you are trying to make *pogem* (to bitter).

Acids play a fundamental role in the foods we eat. To flavor, to enhance, to preserve – acids can do it all. Let's look at some of the fundamental food-grade acids.

Citric Acid

Citric acid is naturally found in citrus fruits such as oranges and lemons. It is an *acidulant*, meaning it either imparts a tart, acidic flavor or enhances the sweetness of foods. It is used in beverages, jams, jellies, canned tomatoes, confections and a plethora of other food applications. An acidulant aids digestion and the absorption of nutrients. Citric acid is used in the pre-washed vegetable industry to control the pH of the wash water and to control the growth of harmful bacteria.

Natural citric acid derived from lemon juice does not present any kashrus or Kosher for Passover (KFP) concerns. However, to produce citric acid in large quantities, commercial citric acid is produced using microbial fermentation using a fungus called *Aspergillus niger*, grown on a sugar culture. Most commercially produced citric acid is derived from corn, the predominant ingredient used in China, which is then dried into a crystallin powder. This does not present a kashrus concern for year-round use but is an issue for Pesach for those who do not use *kitniyos shenishtanu*.

Citric acid produced from sugar can be produced KFP without concern. On rare occasions, European citric acid is produced from a wheat media, which would render it unfit for Pesach.

Ascorbic Acid

Ascorbic acid, also known as vitamin C, is likewise found naturally in citrus fruits. It is not as acidic as citric acid and is used commercially to protect color changes in fruits such as sliced apples. Synthetic ascorbic acid is produced from glucose, which is generally derived from corn starch that has been broken down with the aid of enzymes, acetone and hydrochloric acid. Other starches can also be used as the source material. Ascorbic acid from tapioca starch is acceptable for Pesach, while wheat starch (obviously) is not.

Lactic Acid

The STAR-K Hotline often fields the query, "Is *lactic acid* milchig?" The word *lactic* throws a lot of people off. The truth is that commercially produced lactic acid is pareve even though it can be produced from lactose milk sugar. It is produced through the fermentation of glucose

or sucrose, typically derived from corn. Again, if cane sugar were the starter material, lactic acid could be produced KFP; if produced from lactose, the lactic acid is considered dairy.

Fatty Acid

Fat is a word that strikes fear in the hearts of most diet-conscious consumers. Healthy fats however are necessary to maintain a healthy diet; the body breaks down dietary fats into *fatty acids* that provide the body with energy. Fatty acids are found in meats and vegetables. They have a myriad of applications in the cosmetic, pharmaceutical and food worlds.

One of the most well-known fatty acids is *stearic acid*. A synonym for meat stearic acid is *tallow*. One of the most popular uses of this ubiquitous fatty acid is in the world of candy and pill making as a release agent. As the name clearly suggests, a release agent ensures that the candy or caplet does not stick to the equipment.

One of my greatest challenges was to kasher the century-old Mallinckrodt calcium stearate plant in St. Louis, Missouri. The calcium was being produced from ground limestone. White powder and animal-based stearic acid dust covered every possible surface in the plant, which took me a full three weeks to convert from treif to kosher.

Tartaric Acid

During wine making, wine barrels accumulate a buildup of a crystal-like sediment known as *veinshtein*, which is a combination of tartaric and potassium bitartrate, or *tartaric acid*. When the sediment has dried for twelve months, it is ground into a white powder commercially known as cream of tartar. This is a unique halachic kashrus transformation, in which twelve-month-old non-kosher wine sediment is transformed into kosher cream of tartar – which can then be used in baking powder, jellies, carbonated beverages and leavening.

Acetic Acid

Acetic acid is a natural by-product of vinegar fermentation. It is the component that gives the vinegar its taste and aroma. Of course, the kashrus of vinegar depends on its starter material. The white vinegar purchased in your neighborhood market is produced from corn. Red wine vinegar and balsamic vinegar can be either very kosher or very non-kosher, depending on the source used to convert the wine to vinegar.

Glacial Acetic Acid

Glacial acetic acid is produced synthetically and is typically the KFP vinegar found in the Passover section of your supermarket. Vinegar is an extremely versatile staple in every balabusta's kitchen (and laundry room).

It is truly fascinating to see Hashem's handywork at play as tart acids and bitter bases pass through the litmus tests of halacha. I'm sure my father would agree. ☆

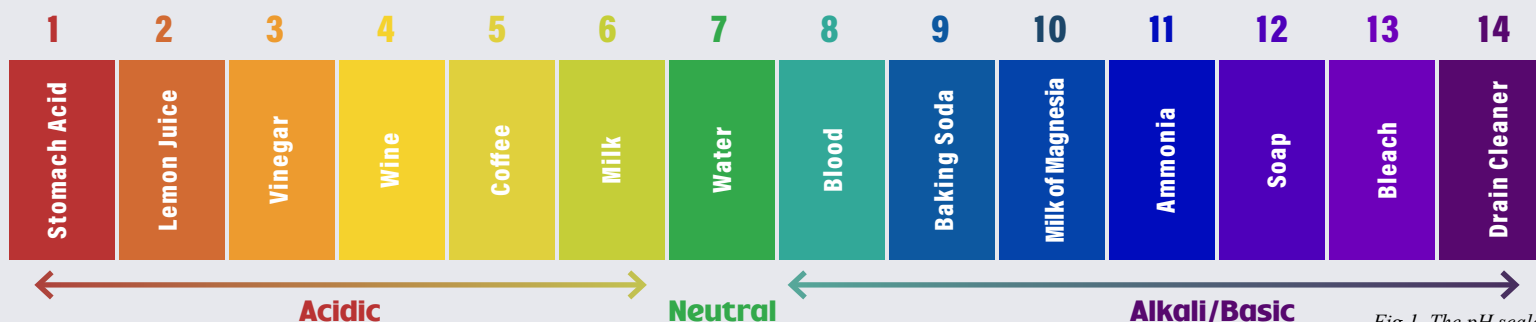


Fig 1. The pH scale



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