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Healthy, Sustainable, Kosher: Food “Fit” to Eat

The word “kosher” means “fit” – and Jews have been evaluating what food is “fit” for them to eat for thousands of years. Jewish institutions generally have policies around kashrut observance; you’ll want to find out what the policy is at your institution if you don’t already know. These policies set the standard for what food may be served to the community at that institution.

While kosher is important, we see an opportunity to expand your consideration of what food is “fit” to eat based on how and where it was grown, and the effects of its production on the people who do the work and the land where it is produced. Just as there are a range of *hechshers* (kosher labels) indicating different levels of kosher supervision, there are a number of different “eco-labels” and terms used today to tell you about how a certain food was made.

We explain these terms and labels here, to guide you in your food choices. And we remind you that, in working with your institution to incorporate more sustainable food into its practices, you will have a lot of choices. Our food system is imperfect, and we don’t suggest that you set out hoping to serve exclusively local, sustainable, FairTrade, kosher, handmade, ethical, recycled everything on your first go. While you may always strive to bring your institution to greater heights of sustainability, be satisfied by incremental steps towards your goal.

Organic

“Organic” refers to a set of farming practices regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture. To be certified organic, farmers must use only approved fertilizers and pesticides on their crops, and ensure that there is no potential for contamination from neighboring, non-organic fields.

The USDA regulates a few different uses of the word “organic” on packaged goods:

- 100% organic - must contain (excluding water and salt) only organically produced ingredients and processing aids. The USDA seal may appear on the packaging.
- Organic - must consist of at least 95% organically produced ingredients (excluding water and salt). Any remaining product ingredients must consist of nonagricultural substances approved on the National List including specific non-organically produced agricultural products that are not commercially available in organic form. The USDA seal may appear on the packaging.
- Made with organic ingredients - must contain at least 70% organic ingredients and list up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups on the principal display panel. The USDA seal cannot be used anywhere on the package.

Organic labels tell you that chemical fertilizers and pesticides were not used on your crops; this is a great step in the right direction, as these substances damage soil structure, poison farm workers, and may potentially cause damage to consumers as well.

Agriculture is the human endeavor most vulnerable to climate change and changing farming practices can do much to mitigate stress humans are putting on the atmosphere. Further, agriculture is the world’s largest industry, employing 1 billion people. “Conventional” (or non-organic) agriculture depends on cheap oil at every step on the food chain from the production of fertilizer to transportation of crops to market. One third of greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to the food system, leading to an unsustainable cycle in which agriculture contributes to climate disruption, which in turn leads to stress on agriculture. Today, experts are calling for a shift from dependence on petrochemicals to an agro-ecological approach that conserves water and energy, builds the fertility of the soil, and values sustainability over the long term.

There are a whole host of other considerations around how vegetables are produced that fall under the

“sustainably-grown” category—a name that is not regulated by the USDA. To really understand how your food is grown, it’s best to ask the people who grow it. Farmers at farm stands or farmer’s markets will tell you about how they grow their vegetables: they may not choose to be certified organic (for economic or logistical reasons), but may in fact follow practices that are even stricter than USDA organic guidelines.

Some of these farmers make a voluntary, non-regulated pledge to follow certain farming practices: for example, the Northeast Organic Farming Association Farmer’s Pledge includes the following commitments, among others:

- Reject the use of synthetic insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers.
- Reject the use of GMO’s, chemically treated seeds, synthetic toxic materials, irradiation, and sewage sludge.
- Treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, access to outdoors and fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, and using no hormones or antibiotics in feed.
- Support markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive.
- Maintain and build healthy soils by farming practices that include rotating crops annually, using compost, cover crops, green manures & reducing tillage.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN EAT MORE ORGANICALLY:

- Avoid the “dirty dozen”. These are foods that are ranked by the Environmental Working Group as having the highest levels of chemicals and pesticides. The EWG estimates that you can reduce your exposure by 80% by only buying organic: apples, celery, strawberries, peaches, spinach, nectarines, grapes, bell peppers, potatoes, blueberries, lettuce, and kale.
- Look for organic brands of popular Jewish foods such as grape juice and matzah
- Purchase organic dairy products

Local

Being able to talk to the people who grow your food is just one reason to buy your food from people who grow it or produce it nearby. Here are a few others:

Taste the freshness! Local food is more likely to be picked when it is ripe, as it does not need to travel over several days to arrive at the market. Additionally, producers who sell locally can choose to grow varieties of vegetables that are known for their flavor and health qualities, rather than just their ability to hold up over long-distance shipping (“heirloom tomatoes” are one such crop; the standard ‘beefsteak’ tomato common in supermarkets was actually bred to be able to travel long distances, sacrificing flavor for convenience. Heirloom tomatoes bruise easily and do not keep for long—but their flavor is out of this world!)

Cut down on the carbon. Nearly one third of all greenhouse gasses emitted come from the production and transportation of food. When a farmer can drive a few hours to deliver their food—rather than ship it thousands of miles—the carbon footprint of your food shrinks dramatically.

Eat your view. Buying local produce means you’re creating a market for people who farm in areas near your city to make a living. If you don’t buy their products, they can’t continue to do what they do. Family farms all over the country are giving way to subdivisions and abandonment, as farmers can get higher prices for selling their land for houses than for vegetables. This means that food has to travel even farther to get to cities, and those rolling green hills you love to drive through on your way out of town are quickly disappearing.

Enjoy the seasons. The Jewish calendar gives us at least one or two holidays each season that call for a feast, and several are in fact tied to agricultural cycles. Using local foods to celebrate means that you’ll have different foods for the holidays because different crops ripen at different times. Eating with the seasons is a great way to notice the passing of the year. When people complain about not having strawberries on the Kiddush fruit platter in the winter, tell them that they’ll really appreciate them when they’re available locally in June!

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN PROMOTE LOCAL FOOD:

- Shop for ingredients at a farmer’s market
- Make a connection between the food and your region (i.e., “New York State is the second largest apple-producer in the country, and we’re serving apples grown just a few hours away...”
- Invite a farmer or local food producer to come speak at your institution (then organize a trip to go visit their farm!)

Food for Thought

A typical carrot has to travel 1,838 miles to reach your dinner table.

Farmers’ markets enable farmers to keep 80 to 90 cents of each dollar spent by the consumer.

Globally, an estimated 1/3 of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) are from our food system and land use changes, which include GHGs emitted to grow, process, package, transport, store and dispose of our food.

GE or GMO Free

Genetic engineering (GE) is the process of transferring specific traits, or genes, from one organism into a different plant or animal. The resulting organism is called transgenic or a GMO (genetically modified organism). 70% of processed foods in American supermarkets now contain genetically modified ingredients—mostly soybeans or corn.

According to Sustainable Table, a consumer education group, “many concerns have been raised over the inadequate testing of the effects of genetic engineering on humans and the environment. Genetic engineering is still an emerging field, and scientists do not know exactly what can result from putting the DNA of one species into another. In addition, researchers do not know if there are any long-term or unintended side effects from eating GE foods.”

From a Jewish perspective, a few concepts help to shed light on questions about GMOs:

- Might the laws of *shatnes* and *kilayim* (prohibitions against mixing species, say, by planting flax and linen in the same field) apply to GE crops, where mixing occurs on a molecular level?
- What about the concept of *'shmirat haguf* (taking care of one's body)? When the health effects of new technologies haven't been fully tested, what is our obligation as Jews to take precautions with our health?
- Are we playing God? While farmers have been breeding plants and animals for thousands of years, selecting for desirable traits (i.e., chickens who lay eggs frequently, or wheat that doesn't drop its seed when it is ripe), the process of actually combining different species that can't mate on their own (spider genes and tomatoes, for example) seems dangerously close to tampering with the wisdom of the natural world. There is a fine line between *letaken ha'olam b'malchut shadai* (perfecting the world for the sake of heaven), and playing with the biological building blocks of life in ways that may have unforeseen and dramatic consequences.

We're not sure about the answer to these questions, but we do strongly caution against GMO crops for the

unknown health risks to people and other species, as well as the dangerous interplay between corporations and the public good. GMO seeds are patented, copyrighted intellectual property. However, seeds are designed to spread with the wind, and mingle with other seeds. When this happens with GMO seeds, the owners of their patents can sue unwitting farmers for 'stealing' their property. In case after case, large seed companies have intimidated farmers, patented seeds which were once common property, and consolidated their power. We see this as an affront to local food security and democracy, and as such recommend that you avoid GMO crops whenever you can.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN AVOID GE/ GMOs:

- Look for foods that are labeled “GMO-free”.
- Avoid foods that contain high-fructose corn syrup, other corn products or soy products; nearly all of the conventional soy and corn crops grown in the US are from GE seeds.
- Eat organic foods. Genetically-modified fruits and vegetables cannot be certified organic by the USDA, and organic meats cannot come from animals that were fed genetically-modified crops.

Fair Labor

It is also important to support the workers who are picking, packing, and serving our food. Part of what makes food so cheap is that the people who actually do the work to produce it are paid very little for their hard work. Additionally, many who work with the toxic pesticides used in commercial agriculture develop cancers and other health problems. Even if studies show that agricultural chemicals don't linger in the food—they linger in the air and the soil of the fields where people are working, and can make them very sick.

Buying food from a farmer you trust is one way to ensure that the people producing your food are treated fairly and paid adequately. But for crops that are produced in other climates—notably coffee, bananas and chocolate—there are a few different certifying agencies who can do your homework for you. These include FLO (Fair Trade Labeling Organization, Fair Trade USA, and IMO/Fair for Life.

Fair Trade ensures that:

- farmers are paid an adequate price for their products,
- farmers have the ability to organize into collectives, increasing their bargaining power
- profits are reinvested into the community to make capital improvements (e.g. building schools and hospitals),
- environmental sustainability methods are used,
- child labor is prohibited

Fair Trade USA (formerly Transfair) recently resigned its membership from FLO and launched its own program, "Fair Trade for All", which is setting up new certification criteria and extending its program to include farmers on plantations. FLO is in the process of establishing a new certifying body for products distributed in the U.S.

To be sure that your product is made according to Fair Trade standards, look for one of these Fair Trade labels on: Bananas, Chocolate, Tea, Rice, Coffee, Cocoa (chocolate), Fresh Fruit, Honey, Juices, Sugar, Spices/ Herbs, and Wine.



HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN PROMOTE FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS:

- Promote Fair Trade products for your kiddush, such as fruits and wine.
- Hang Fair Trade fruit in your sukkah.
- Switch to using Fair Trade tea and coffee.
- Hold a Fair Trade tasting event so people can see the range of Fair Trade products and decide which Fair Trade tea, coffee, or chocolate is their favorite.
- Ask caterers to use Fair Trade ingredients (be sure to tell the guests on the invitation that you will be serving Fair Trade products).
- Hold a film showing or educational program on the issues surrounding Fair Trade.
- Hold a Fair Trade bagel brunch and serve Fair Trade tea, coffee, sugar, and fruit.
- Ask your gift shop to carry Fair Trade products

Look for Eco-Kosher Heckshers

These encourage consumers to buy from kosher food producers who care for the environment, animals, and their workers.

- **Earth Kosher** certifies a range of food, clothing, and health products.
- Natural Food Certifiers offers an **Apple K Kosher** label for kosher food that is also healthy.
- **Wholesome kosher (WK)** certifies healthy and kosher food in the U.S.

Thanks to Ilana Schatz from Fair Trade Judaica for consulting with us on this section.

Buy Fair Trade Products

Since embarking on my current role as the Jewish Social Action Forum Campaigns Coordinator I have come to realize how fundamental the concept of fair trade is to build and sustain a just world. Buying Fair trade is a practical way of expressing an opinion on trade justice and is concurrent with Jewish values.

When we purchase something in the United States that carries the Fair trade mark it guarantees that farmers in the developing world are paid a fair price for their product. Furthermore, a premium is given back to the farmers and their communities by being part of a Fair trade cooperative. This premium is often spent on building schools, hospitals and better road systems. For those living in extreme poverty, powerless in the global economy, Fair trade has come to mean an education for their children, clean water supplies, electricity and a level of health care they could never have dreamed of. It is the difference between being stuck in a permanent cycle of poverty and having the chance to build a better future.

You may be asking “Why should I purchase Fair trade products for my Jewish institution? Is it really necessary for our community to be involved in a campaign about these things?” The root of the word tzedaka is ‘tzedek’, meaning justice or righteousness. So when we are obliged to give tzedakah we must

do more than put loose change in a charity box. In our act of tzedakah we must seek justice to create a fairer world. As Jews we should be buying fair trade produce and dedicate time and resources to ensuring this happens.

There are more and more fair trade products that are certified kosher, so whether it is at home, at a simcha or in your synagogue, it is easy to change to fair trade. It is not just food—clothing can also be fair-trade. It is now even possible to purchase Fair trade kippot, made in India from Fair trade cotton.

We have a chance to change the lives of the world’s poorest people through what we choose from the shelves of our supermarkets. So next time you go shopping, choose Fair trade. As consumer, we do not need to accept trade injustice. By making the simple decision to switch to Fair trade products we can, while shopping, help create a more just society for those who produce our goods.

Adapted from “Why Buy Fair trade” by Poppy Berelowitz, on The Big Green Jewish Website—a fantastic resource that includes facts, Jewish texts, and Jewish programming ideas, based in the United Kingdom. www.biggreenjewish.org

Organizations Working on Fair Labor issues in the Jewish Community

In recent years, a number of different projects have launched in the Jewish community around fair labor practices. We list these organizations here, so you can familiarize yourself with their work and to show the breadth of the Jewish sustainable food movement. Jews from all walks of life are starting to pay attention and make a difference:

- B’Ma’aglei Tzedek’s **Tav Chevrati** is an Israel-based certification for businesses and restaurants that indicates workers are fairly treated and the facility is accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Fair Trade Judaica** promotes fair trade as a Jewish value through educating the Jewish community, and expanding the production, distribution, and sale of fair trade Judaica products.
- **The Hekhsher Tzedek Commission** brings the Jewish commitment to ethics and social justice directly into the marketplace and the home.

The Commission’s seal of approval, the **Magen Tzedek**, will help assure consumers that kosher food products were produced in keeping with the highest possible Jewish ethical values and ideals for social justice in the areas of labor concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, consumer issues, and corporate integrity.

- **Uri L’tzedek**, an orthodox social justice organization, has created an ethical seal for kosher restaurants called **Tav HaYosher**. This seal is a local, grassroots initiative to bring workers, restaurant owners, and community members together to create just workplaces in kosher restaurants.

Kosher Sustainable Chocolate

CHOCOLATE. Need we say more? Actually yes – because a run-of-the mill bar of Hershey’s pales in comparison to the sweet, cocoa ambrosia listed below. All of these chocolate snacks are kosher-certified and some combination of organic, Fair Trade, cane sugar-sweetened, and vegan.

Chocolove: Made in Colorado, these chocolate bars are organic, kosher (Scroll K, Denver), and come in a variety of different flavors from ginger to orange peel to toffee and almonds. They are also some of the most beautifully wrapped chocolate bars we’ve ever seen.

Dagoba: Dagoba chocolates are made by an Oregon-based company with organic, certified fair-trade and KSA kosher, and the bars come either plain (milk or dark chocolate) or infused with dried cherry, hazelnut, coffee, hot chili, or mint. Dagoba also makes amazing hot chocolate mix.

Equal Exchange: This Massachusetts-based fair trade organization sells chocolate bars and hot chocolate that are made with organic ingredients and are certified by the Kashrut Council of Canada.

Lake Champlain: This Vermont-based company makes both conventional and organic chocolates.

Late July Dark Chocolate Sandwich Cookies: The cocoa flavor in these cookies stands up to any bar of chocolate – and there’s even more chocolatey-goodness (in creme form) inside! These cookies are certified by the OU and are also organic.

Seeds of Change: These chocolate bars look and taste like treasures. Their Santa Caterina bar is filled with mango, toasted coconut, and cashews and, like all their chocolate bars, is certified kosher and made with organic ingredients.

Sunspire: These chocolate bars (and baking chips and candies) have it all. They are certified organic and kosher (OU), come in a variety of yummy flavors like raspberry, peanut, and peppermint patty, are sweetened with natural cane juice and organic sugars, and offer vegan-friendly options.

Terra Nostra: Terra Nostra is a founding member of Equitable Trade, which gives farmers fair trade benefits with organic chocolate production and offers several vegan bars. Terra Nostra will soon introduce a line of truffles to go with their bars, specializing in pomegranate and ancho chili flavors.

Kosher Sustainable Wine

Organic wine can be hard to find, but there is more and more of it available on the shelves. Additionally, many wines from Europe are completely or almost completely organic, even if they’re not certified. Ask your sommelier! Kosher organic wine is even more difficult to find – but it does exist! Here are several wineries that make kosher organic wine.

Four Gates Winery: California-based, organic, kosher for Pesach/year-round, not mevushal

Yarden Chardonnay Odem Organic: Israel-based, organic, kosher for Pesach/year-round, not mevushal

Hafner Winery: Austria-based, bottled under the name “Queen Esther,” organically-grown grapes, kosher for Pesach, mevushal

Baron Herzog: California based, Not certified organic, but many of Baron Herzog’s wines come from “sustainably grown/low spray” grapes, mevushal and many varieties

Food from Farm Animals

Eating lower on the food chain (eating fewer animals and animal products) reduces stress on the environment and can be better for personal health. When purchasing and eating food from farm animals keep these guidelines in mind. Customer demand for cheap food doesn't stop with vegetables: in fact, meat, dairy and eggs are one of the largest components of the commercial agricultural system. As with "organics," there are a lot of terms used to describe feeding and handling practices used. It's important to understand these terms when you're considering what eggs to use for your egg salad, cream to use in your coffee, and meat to serve (or not serve) at a special event.

Chicken & Eggs: Chickens are originally from the jungle. They like to scratch in the dirt for bugs, and "dustbathe," which is how they stay cool and clean. Chickens are omnivores, and need a significant amount of protein in their diet (whether they are being grown for meat or eggs). Poultry products that are labeled "**pastured**" or "**raised on pasture**" mean that the animals had a chance to run around outside, eat grass and bugs (and likely a supplemental feed as well, which may or may not be organic or GMO-free).

Poultry products labeled "**free-range**," "**cage-free**," or "**free roaming**" are all raised indoors in a factory, albeit with somewhat more room than those products that carry none of these labels.

Chickens are never given hormones in the U.S.

Dairy products: Cows are routinely fed growth hormones to increase their milk production. The effects of these hormones on people are not fully known, but many people seek to avoid them. The dairy industry has also seen massive consolidation, with low milk prices causing the near collapse of a once-thriving family farm sector in the Northeast. Buying milk from "**grass-fed**" or "**pasture-raised**" cows "**never treated with rBST**" means that you're avoiding extra hormones, and supporting farmers who are taking good care of their animals.

Beef: Conventionally-raised meat cows are routinely fed hormones to increase their growth rates. They are raised in feedlots with thousands of other cows, in conditions that promote disease. To combat this, preventative antibiotics are added to their food. This overuse of antibiotics stimulates the creation of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, reducing the drug's effectiveness in treating human illness.

Cows are ruminants, and their series of four stomachs are meant to digest grass and other forage crops. However, they put on more weight (and fat) when

fed grain, so commercial meat cows are fed mostly corn and soybeans. Since cows' stomachs aren't designed to digest these foods, unused digestive acids meant to break down grass and other forage builds up. Outbreaks of E.coli that have been fatal to people can be linked to this acid build up in cows. Human stomachs are naturally high-acid, and bacteria that develops in a low-acid environment (such as the stomach of a grass-fed cow) can't survive. However, when cows' stomachs become highly acidic, bacteria strains that develop there will survive when they end up in human stomachs.

Another reason that grain-fed cows pose health problems for people is the high fat content of the meat they produce. Americans love "marbled" meat -- this is achieved by feeding cows grain. Meat from cows raised on pasture is much leaner overall.

The environmental effects of large-scale animal agriculture are huge. While cow manure can fertilize a well-managed pasture, creating a balanced closed-loop ecosystem, manure from cows raised in feedlots has nowhere to go. Giant sewage lagoons of animal waste pollute waterways and cause unpleasant odors for miles around.

Finally, the conglomeration of commercial animal facilities means that outbreaks of E.coli, salmonella or other harmful bacteria can spread to millions of people across the country. While every piece of meat sold in an American supermarket can be traced to the slaughterhouse where it was produced, the combining of meat from multiple sources in a slaughterhouse means that contaminated meat can't be further traced back to the original source, where the initial contamination might have occurred.

When looking for an alternative to the industrial meat industry, labeling can be confusing and misleading.

Grass-fed beef with the USDA "process verified shield" requires that cattle must be fed only mother's milk and forage (grass and other greens) during their lifetime. However, grass-fed meat can qualify for the shield even if the animals are confined to a pen, fed hay for months out of the year, and even given hormones and a steady diet of antibiotics. The American Grassfed Association (AGA) label is considered a more stringent label but is currently not regulated by the government. **Pastured** or **pasture-raised** animals begin their lives eating grass but, particularly during industrial production, spend the remainder of their lives in confined feedlots, being grain fed. For now, the best way to ensure that the product is truly raised and slaughtered ethically and sustainably is to talk with the rancher or farmer who raised the animal.

Sustainable Kosher Meat Providers: In their Own Words

Labels and seals on food packaging can be unclear and even misleading. Here is what kosher meat producers – from small coops and new businesses, to long established ones - are saying about their products. We encourage you to examine what is being said and what is not being said and when in doubt, talk to the provider directly.

Eco-Glatt provides eco-conscious, spiritually-based people the healthiest, highest-quality, holiest kosher meat on Earth. We also want you be able to eat the most delicious lamb, beef, bison, goat, elk (and even yak) around.

<http://www.ecoglatt.com>

Grow and Behold brings you delicious OU Glatt Kosher pastured meats raised on small family farms. We adhere to the strictest standards of kashrut, animal welfare, worker treatment, and sustainable agriculture. We do it right, so you can enjoy every bite!

<http://www.growandbehold.com/>

Empire Kosher Defining the principles of green kosher. Eating healthy, safely, and strictly kosher, buy responsibly, promoting working and animal rights, protecting the environment, and supporting small family farmers and their communities.

<http://www.empirekosher.com/>

Kol Foods Honest & healthy. Sustainable & Humane. Deliciously mouthwatering. We help you balance modern & traditional values. The kosher world is not free of the bewilderment and fear surrounding our meat, but at KOL Foods we come close. In an age when it takes an investigative reporter to clarify where your meat comes from, we are committed to telling its honest story. We want you to know and trust that each animal is raised in the traditional, environmentally-friendly way, on open fields. We are committed to kashrut, sustainability, transparency, animal welfare, your health and offering the most delicious meat on the market. And with our home delivery, we are convenient to boot! KOL Foods is what kosher should be.

<http://www.kolfoods.com/>

Murray's chickens are raised in Pennsylvania's lush countryside by a select number of family farms. Their leisurely lifestyle includes plenty of fresh air and an all-vegetable diet free of antibiotics and hormones.

<http://murrayschicken.com>

At **Wise Organic Pastures**, we hold these truths to be self-evident. Animals should be treated with dignity and allowed to roam free. Meat is no place for antibiotics or hormones or pesticides. Families, not big business, make the best farmers. That nourishing ourselves is a sacred act. The quality and purity of the foods we eat is not negotiable. That's why we insist on bringing only the healthiest, best-tasting, humanely raised beef and poultry to market. It's organic. It's kosher. It's WISE.

<http://www.wiseorganicpastures.com/>

How do you make kosher meat?

Kosher Animals The first step in kosher meat is the actual species of meat. Chicken, turkey, duck and geese are all kosher species; there are varying traditions regarding the kashrut of other fowls, such as quail, pheasant, squib and pigeons. Birds of prey are generally not kosher. For larger animals, kosher laws permit the consumption of species that chew their cud and have split hooves. This includes, cows, sheep, goats, bison, deer, elk and even giraffe, though beef and lamb are generally the most common meat in the kosher marketplace.

Kosher Slaughter (Shechitah) To make kosher meat, a kosher animal must be slaughtered in a very specific manner, according to the laws of *shechitah* (kosher slaughter), which Jews have followed for generations. The *shochet* (slaughterer) is highly trained in both the act of the slaughter and all the specific laws that must be followed, and must have a high level of *yira'at shamayim* (awe of heaven). The training process for *shochtim* is long and arduous, in order to ensure that only individuals with the skills and temperament can perform this holy task, because the act of slaughter occurs with the utmost level of respect for the animal and the laws of kashrut.

The *shochet* uses a perfectly sharp knife that is at least twice the length of the animal's neck and checked against the *shochet's* fingernail for nicks. Any nick at all would tear the flesh of the animal, causing great pain and rendering the slaughter invalid. After making a blessing, the *shochet* uses a very fast, continuous cutting motion to quickly sever the trachea, esophagus and major blood vessels in the neck. This causes the animal a minimum amount of pain and ensures a quick drop of blood pressure to the brain and nearly immediate loss of sensibility.

Kosher inspection The lungs and innards of kosher slaughtered animals must be inspected by a trained *bodek* (inspector) for imperfections that might render the animal *traif* (non-kosher, literally "torn") and unfit for kosher consumption. The *bodek* inspects for adhesions, both between the lobes of the lungs and between the lobes and ribcage. The lungs are inflated with air and submerged in water to check for any bubbles that would indicate a perforation. Animals with lungs that are free of perforations and major adhesions can be ruled "glatt" kosher, literally, "smooth".

"Butt" Wait, There's More In North America, only the front half of the red meat animals are used for kosher consumption, due to the presence of forbidden fats and nerves in the rear of the animal that are very difficult to remove. After separation of the hind from the fore, there are a number of major blood vessels that must be removed from the meat in a process known as *nikkur*, or traiboring (deveining).

Soaking, Salting, and Labeling Jewish law prohibits the consumption of the lifeblood of the animal. All kosher meat and poultry must undergo a special process to remove it. The meat or poultry is soaked in clean water for thirty minutes, then removed to drip dry. The meat is then salted and left to hang for sixty minutes to further draw out any remaining blood. The meat is washed three times in cold, clean water to remove the salt. Finally, the result: clean, fresh, and kosher meat. After the final washing, the meat is dried, further butchered into retail cuts, and packaged and sealed for both consumer safety and kashrut.

What Kosher Doesn't Necessarily Mean With the exception of the processes noted above, the kosher meat industry generally resembles the conventional meat industry. Animals come from a range of different kinds of farms, but generally the farms are large. Animals have limited room to move around and eat mostly corn and soybeans. Meat factories are expensive to run and operate at a furious pace; a one minute delay could cost thousands of dollars. As a result, conditions for workers are at best unpleasant and often unsafe. And although the soaking and salting process is an excellent sanitizer, the volume of production in large-scale factories creates the potential for the spread of pathogens that can make people sick.

This section adapted from a piece by Naftali Hanau, founder of Grow and Behold Foods

Kosher Sustainable Cheese

Until recently, the world of kosher cheese was pretty bleak. On the one hand you had shrink wrapped, industrial-produced (but kosher-certified) brands like Miller's. On the other, hand you had artisanal, raw-milk and hand-crafted (but not kosher-certified) cheeses. These days the tide is turning. While not all certified-organic, the cheese companies below allow you to have your kosher cheese and eat ethically too!

5-Spoke Creamery: Starting with raw-milk from grass-fed cows that are free of hormones and antibiotics, hand-crafted artisanal cheeses are produced, including Cheddar, Herbal Jack, Colby, Tumbleweed, Talcott, and Browning Gold aged cheddar. Tablet-K certified.

Cabot Creamery is a farm family-owned cooperative located in the hills of Vermont producing all natural, award-winning cheeses, including the "World's Best Cheddar", as well as a tasty variety of flavored cheddars. Some cheeses Tablet-K certified.

Mainland Grass-fed Organic: This New Zealand-based company now offers a grass-fed organic cheddar that is OK certified.

Organic Meadow Cottage Cheese: This Canadian company produces organic cottage cheeses as well as cheeses with a mild, creamy taste.

Organic Valley Cottage Cheese: The cottage cheese from Organic Valley is hand-crafted without preservatives or additives, free of animal by-products, hormones, or antibiotics and comes from humanely treated cows.

Redwood Hill Farm: These artisanally crafted goat cheeses are delicious. They offer creamy chevre, goat feta, and several other varieties of goat-milk cheeses. While Redwood Hill Farm is not certified organic, they use almost exclusively organic practices.

Sugar River Cheese Company: This Wisconsin-based cheese company produces a wide variety of cheeses (everything from White Cheddar Chipotle to Prairie Jack with Parsley and Chive) all certified by the Chicago Rabbinical Council and the OK. All of their products are free of growth hormones (and some of the milk comes from nearby Amish farms). The company also has a charitable giving program.

Tillamook Kosher Cheddar: This Oregon-based company is actually a 98-year-old farmer cooperative. Like all of their cheeses, the milk used to make their cheddar is free of growth hormones. (For folks living in or visiting the Pacific Northwest, a visit to their factory is also a lot of fun!)

Narragansett Creamery: This Rhode Island-based company is a four-year-old venture is the only cheese company in the state, and, while not available in markets out of state, you can order their products online and they will be delivered straight to you!

Bonus! The biggest difficulty with making kosher cheese is finding a rennet (the milk coagulant) that does not come from an animal – traditionally a cow stomach. Here are some traditional vegetable rennets that are animal-free: fig leaf sap, melon, thistle flowers, safflower, lemon juice, and bay leaves.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN USE SUSTAINABLE DAIRY, EGGS, AND MEAT:

- Switch to organic milk and cream.
- Buy milk in reusable glass jars.
- Use local eggs.
- Source your meat from a sustainable kosher meat provider, listed above.
- Serve less meat.

Food from the Sea

According to Leviticus 11:9-12, any fish that has fins and scales is kosher. These criterion rule out seafood such as eels, shellfish, and catfish. Fish is considered pareve and can be eaten with either milk or meat. There is no particular method of slaughter required for fish and, therefore, any fresh fish with fins and scales is kosher.

Fish are the last group of wild animals that are hunted for large scale consumption. As worldwide demand for fish has increased, wild fish populations can't keep up with our appetites, and find themselves threatened by overfishing (harvesting at faster rates than the population can reproduce) and by-catch (accidental death caused by trawls, dredges, long-lining, purse seining, and gill-netting). Scientists suspect that due to overfishing and by-catch, 90% of the large predatory fish populations have been depleted.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch is one of the leading organizations working to protect our oceans and fish populations. Seafood Watch has created several resources to help consumers make educated choices. Their "sustainable" certification for fish is based on the concept of "ocean friendly," which assesses damage to the environment during the fishing/fish farming process, health and abundance of the fish population, the amount of by-catch from the fishing process, and how well the fishery or fish farm is managed.

Tuna that is labeled "dolphin safe" means that no dolphins are intentionally harmed during the fishing process. This certification still allows fishermen to lower nets around schools of tuna and dolphins but they must lower the nets enough to allow dolphins to escape. Although the dolphin safe label has improved conditions for dolphins, research indicates that dolphins face health risks due to the stress of the fishing process: including being temporarily captured, which often results in heart problems, miscarriages, and mothers being separated from their calves, which results in the death of the calves. Therefore, Seafood Watch recommends purchasing hook and line caught canned tuna, instead of "dolphin safe" tuna.

Aquaculture, the process of farming fish in either fresh or saltwater, is the fastest growing method of animal food production. Nearly 50% of the fish consumed worldwide come from fish farms. Depending on the type of fish, location of farm, and farming practices, aquaculture can offer either a sustainable option or one that is equally problematic to wild caught fish. Farmed salmon is one such example. These salmon are

raised in coastal waters and, therefore, the pollution generated by the farm flows into the coastal water. Large numbers of salmon are kept in a pen, resulting in diseases and parasites, which can easily spread to wild salmon swimming nearby. It is not uncommon for the farmed salmon to break out of these pens and compete with wild salmon populations. Additionally, farm raised salmon require approximately 3 pounds of wild fish to produce 1 pound of farmed salmon, which is an unsustainable ratio. The most sustainable options for farmed fish include those which are herbivores or omnivores. Some of the best farm raised options include: arctic char, striped bass, and U.S. raised barramundi, cobia, tilapia, and rainbow trout.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN SOURCE AND USE SUSTAINABLE FISH:

- Print a sustainable fish pocket guide from Seafood Watch (or download their free smartphone app) and use this guide before purchasing fish.
- Serve Pacific sardines, which reproduce quickly and are currently abundant.
- Purchase fish that has the Marine Stewardship Council certification.
- Make your tuna salad with pole/troll caught albacore tuna from the U.S. or Canada.
- Make sure the lox on your bagel is wild-caught from Alaska.

Seafood Watch's Super Green List

Fish that are good for you and good for the earth, the Super Green List includes fish that meet these criteria:

- Low levels of contaminants (below 216 parts per billion [ppb] mercury and 11 ppb PCBs)
- The daily minimum of omega-3s (at least 250 milligrams per day [mg/d])*
- Classified as a Seafood Watch "Best Choice" (green)

The Best of the Best (July 2013)

- Atlantic Mackerel (purse seine from Canada and the U.S.)
- Freshwater Coho Salmon (farmed in tank systems, from the U.S.)
- Pacific Sardines (wild-caught)
- Salmon (wild-caught, from Alaska)
- Salmon, canned (wild-caught from Alaska)
- Albacore Tuna (troll- or pole-caught, from the U.S. of British Columbia)
- Sablefish/Black Cod (from Alaska and Canadian Pacific)

Healthful

Keeping your congregation healthy is just another part of having a sustainable community. There are many different aspects of staying and eating healthy, but here are some to keep in mind:

Vegetarian: Consider making some of your events vegetarian events, or have at least one vegetarian/meatless/vegan option at all meals and events. Necessary nutrients can be found in vegetables, grains, nuts, soy products, eggs, and dairy. Vegetarian diets have lower levels of saturated fat, cholesterol, and animal protein, while having higher levels of carbohydrates, fiber, magnesium, potassium, folate, antioxidants, and vitamins. Eating lower on the food chain also reduces stress on natural systems, including reducing greenhouse gas emission that are fueling climate change. Check out Veguary (www.veguary.org) for more information.

Whole Grains: A whole grain contains all parts of the original plant, and therefore will not lose any of its nutrients after processing/cooking. The benefits of eating a diet heavy in whole grains includes reduced risk of stroke, diabetes, heart disease, and weight gain. Serving whole grains, such as brown rice, wheat berries, or quinoa, at your events will help to keep your whole congregation healthy and active. Check out the Whole Grains Council (www.wholegrainscouncil.org) for more information.

Low Sodium: Sodium is a periodic element that is water soluble, and necessary in small quantities to help maintain a fluid balance, transmit nerve impulses, and contract/relax your muscles. But too much sodium can be dangerous, leading to fluid retention, high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney failure, and stroke. Many processed foods contain more sodium than foods you would make at home, so make sure to check the labels on the pre-packaged foods that you are buying, and always look for “Low-Sodium” alternatives. If people want to add more salt, let them do it on their own.

Serve Water: Everyone knows that drinking enough water is crucial to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, but that doesn't mean that they actually drink the suggested amounts. The U.S. government recommends 3.7 liters of water per day for a male over the age of 18, and 2.7 liters of water per day for a female over the age of 18. Providing water at all of your events, especially when food and other drinks are served, is an easy way to make sure that people are reaching their daily intake needs and cutting back on sugar-filled sodas and juices. Invest in pitchers or a water cooler rather than

providing disposable plastic bottles at events.

High Fructose Corn Syrup: High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is any corn syrup that has been processed in order to turn some of its naturally occurring glucose into fructose to make it sweeter. In the US, HFCS has become one of the most widely-used sweetening methods for commercially produced foods. The use of HFCS in foods has been linked to obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. An easy way to avoid HFCS is to avoid buying processed and pre-packaged foods. Additionally, stock up on kosher-for-Passover items such as ketchup and salad dressing— while made with HFCS year round, the Passover versions are made with regular sugar.

Healthy Vending Machines – A Growing Trend

As awareness of junk food and its negative health and environmental impacts increases, healthier options are also increasing, and not only in stores and farmers markets but even in vending machines! These machines provide snack options that reflect the healthful suggestions made in this section. Search online for “healthy vending machines” to find vendor options in your area.

Different Kinds of Fat: There are many different kinds of fats in the world, some that are good, and some that are very bad. Trying to serve as little of the “bad” fat is an important step in keeping your congregation healthy. Serving low-fat foods is a good place to begin. Home-cooked foods often have less fat than their store-bought alternatives because you can control what goes into them.

- **Trans fats** – Also known as unsaturated fats, trans fats are not essential, and provide no known benefit to human health. Because of this, the National Academy of Sciences has concluded that there is no safe level of trans fat consumption.
- **Hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated oils** – Hydrogenation is a process through which oils are heated and hydrogen is passed through them in order to make them denser. Fully hydrogenated oil is actually a solid fat and partially hydrogenated oil has a consistency like that of butter. These have high levels of trans fats and are very closely linked

to obesity.

- **Saturated fats** – Saturated fats are naturally found in certain foods, especially animal products (such as butter, cheese, and meat), as well as certain vegetable products (such as coconut oil). While it would be nearly impossible to cut saturated fats completely out of your diet, it is highly recommended that you cut back as much as possible.
- **Essential fatty acids** – Also called EFAs, these fats are necessary for your body’s biological processes, but they can’t be produced by your body. These important fatty acids can be found naturally in many common foods, such as fish, flaxseed, soya oil, canola oil, leafy vegetables, and walnuts (although more of the good fatty acid is absorbed from meat than from vegetable sources). EFAs are crucial for heart health.

Juice/Soda: While juice and soda might be the most popular beverage options for your group, they often contain high amounts of processed sugars or high fructose corn syrup and add extra calories that no one needs. If you do want to serve juice or soda at your

events, make sure to get juices that have high contents of “real fruit juice” (the basic recommendation is at least 50%); and in terms of soda, try serving flavored seltzer instead, or try a less processed soda, such as GUS: Grown Up Soda. Other healthy drink options include water, unsweetened iced tea, and non-fat/1%-fat milk.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN START TO SERVE HEALTHIER FOODS

- Use brown rice instead of white, or whole grain salads (such as wheat berries) instead of cous cous.
- Serve flavored seltzer rather than soda.
- Make sure plain water is available whenever drinks are served.
- Choose to have home-cooked food whenever possible.
- When purchasing foods, buy low-fat or low-sodium products if they’re available.
- Use canola oil instead of butter.
- Serve fish that’s high omega-3 fatty acids.
- Have at least one vegetable/vegetarian option at every meal.

Prices: Can we afford to do this?

You can’t afford not to! Buying sustainable products may be a little more expensive, but once you know what you are (or aren’t) paying for, the benefits of sustainable foods on the health of your community and the environment outweigh the slight price increase. It may mean that you will have to adjust your institution’s budget to spend more on food, but it is an important adjustment.

Tips for buying sustainable foods with price in mind:

- **Beware of the markup.** Many grocery stores add 150%-200% markup on organic products. A coop or farmers market will likely have lower markups, or none at all. When you buy closer to the source, less of your money goes to middlemen (the costs of running the supermarket, for example) and more goes right to the farmer.

- **Buy in bulk.** Buying in bulk will keep costs down. Look for pantry staples often available in bulk, such as beans, legumes, rice, flour, nuts, chocolate chips, and much more. Many local co-ops have extensive organic bulk sections. At a farmers market, you may get a good price for a whole case of fruit for your Kiddush fruit tray.
- **Buy in season.** When foods are locally abundant, they may be lower in price (although premium products may always be more expensive, even when they are in season, especially if the season is short, as it is for strawberries or sour cherries). Again, when you’re buying local foods, your money is going all to the local farmer, rather than the shipping and packaging companies.
- **Be selective.** You may wish to pick a few foods to focus on at first. Make the switch to fair trade coffee, or locally-produced milk, or fruit from a local farmer. Big change starts with small steps.