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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, fair-trade, 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.

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 & fertilizers.
- Reject the use of GMO’s, chemically treated seeds, synthetic toxic materials, irradiation & sewage sludge.
- Treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, access to outdoors & fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, & using no hormones or antibiotics in feed.
- Support markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive.
- Maintain & 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 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/GMO FOOD:

- 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.

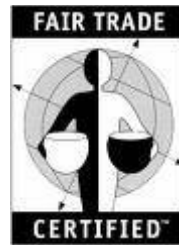
Fair Trade

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.

“Fair Trade” labels, such as “Fair Trade Certified”, “Fairtrade” (UK) ensure that farmers are paid an adequate price for their products. Fair Trade also helps farmers organize into collectives to increase their bargaining power and make capital improvements to their community, including building schools and hospitals.



Look for the Fair Trade label on: Bananas, Chocolate, Tea, Rice, Coffee, Cocoa (chocolate), Fresh fruit, Honey, Juices, Sugar, Spices/ Herbs, Wine

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN PROMOTE FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS:

- Promote Fair Trade for your kiddish such as fruits and wine
- Hanging Fair Trade fruit in your institution's Sukkah
- Switch to using Fair Trade tea and coffee in your institution
- Use Fair Trade as a theme when fundraising for

Buy Fairtrade 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 fairtrade is to build and sustain a just world. Buying Fairtrade 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 Fairtrade 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 Fairtrade co-operative. This premium is often spent on building schools, hospitals and better road systems. For those living in extreme poverty, powerless in the global economy, Fairtrade 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 Fairtrade 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 Tzedeka we must do more than put loose change in a charity box. In our act of Tzedeka we must seek justice to create a fairer world. As Jews we should be buying fairtrade produce and dedicate time and resources to ensuring this happens.

There are more and more fairtrade products that are certified kosher, so whether it is at home, at a simcha or in your synagogue, it is easy to change to fairtrade. It is not just food—clothing can also be fair-trade. It is now even possible to purchase Fairtrade Kippot, made in India from Fairtrade 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 Fairtrade. As consumer, we do not need to accept trade injustice. By making the simple decision to switch to Fairtrade products we can, while shopping, help create a more just society for those who produce our goods.

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

- your organization
- Produce a Fairtrade cookbook
- 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 Fairtrade bagel brunch and serve Fairtrade tea, coffee, sugar, and fruit

You can also buy food with the United Farm worker's Label, which indicates that workers were paid fair wages.

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.

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:

- **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.
- **Ma'aglei Tzedek** is an Israel-based certification for businesses and restaurants that indicates workers are fairly treated and the facility is accessible to people with disabilities.
- **The Hekhsher Tzedek Commission** is working to bring 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 area of labor concerns, animal welfare, environmental impact, consumer issues and corporate integrity.

Food from Farm Animals

Customer demand for cheap food doesn't stop with vegetables, and 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.

How do you make kosher meat?

This section by Naftali Hanau, founder of Grow and Behold Foods

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 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, and in order to ensure that only individuals with the skills and temperament can perform this holy task, and that 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 animals 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 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.

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.

Chicken are never given hormones in the US.

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: As with dairy cows, 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. Antibiotics fed to livestock can cause resistance to these antibiotics in people, reducing their 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, and commercial meat cows are fed mostly corn and soybeans. This can cause acid to build up in their stomachs, which aren’t designed to digest these foods. Interestingly, outbreaks of

E.coli that have been fatal to people can be linked to this acid build up in cows: People have naturally high-acid stomachs, and bacteria that develop in a low-acid environment (such as the stomach of a grass-fed cow) can’t survive. However, when cow’s stomachs become highly acidic, bacteria strains that develop there can also live 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. Where 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 mean that outbreaks of E.coli, salmonella or other harmful bacteria can spread to millions of people across the country, and be very hard to trace back to their source. Buying meat, chicken, eggs and dairy from producers that you know—on farms you could, in theory, actually visit—is one way to ensure that your food is safe to eat.

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 parve 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, longlining, purse seining, and gillnetting). Scientists suspect that due to overfishing and bycatch, 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 portable resources to help consumers make educated choices. Their “sustainable” certification for fish is based on “ocean friendly” based on damage to the environment during the fishing/fish farming process, health and abundance of the fish population, the amount of bycatch from the fishing process, and how well the fishery or fish farm is managed. Look for the Marine Stewardship Council label while you are shopping to ensure that you are purchasing sustainable fish.

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. 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 being temporarily captured, often resulting in heart problems, miscarriages, and mothers being separated from their calves, resulting 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 US raised baramundi, cobia, tilapia and rainbow trout.

Nearly all fish contain some amount of mercury, a chemical which can be dangerous for small children and women who are pregnant, nursing, or thinking of becoming pregnant. Larger fish, such as swordfish and mackerel have higher levels of mercury because the fish have been exposed to mercury for longer. The EPA recommends avoiding large fish that are high in mercury and limiting fish consumption to two meals a week consisting of fish with lower levels of mercury such as pollack, salmon, or canned light tuna.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN SOURCE SUSTAINABLE DAIRY, EGGS, MEAT AND FISH:

- Switch to organic milk & cream
- Buy milk in recyclable glass jars
- Use local eggs for egg salad
- Source your meat from one of the new sustainable kosher meat companies that have launched in the past few years
- Serve less meat
- Print a sustainable fish pocket guide from Seafood Watch 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 poll/troll caught Albacore Tuna from the US or Canada
- Make sure the lox on your bagel is wild-caught from Alaska

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, fibre, magnesium, potassium, folate, and antioxidants and vitamins. Check out Veguary (www.veguary.org) for more information.

Whole Grains: A whole grain contains all parts of the original plant, and which therefore will not lose any of its nutrients after processing/cooking. The benefits of eating a diet heavy in whole grains include: 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 just because they know doesn’t mean that actually drink the suggested amounts. The US 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 its naturally occurring glucose into fructose to make it sweeter. In the US, HFCS has become one of the most widely-used sweetening

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: September 2010

- Albacore Tuna (troll- or pole-caught, from the U.S. or British Columbia)
- Freshwater Coho Salmon (farmed in tank systems, from the U.S.)
- Pacific Sardines (wild-caught)
- Rainbow Trout (farmed)
- Salmon (wild-caught, from Alaska)
- Arctic Char (farmed)
- Barramundi (farmed, from the U.S.)

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.

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 and chocolate). 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 (see above), 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

The Mayo Clinic website (www.mayoclinic.com) is an excellent resource to get more information on any of the topics discussed above.

- Serve fish that’s high Omega-3 fatty acids
- Have at least one vegetable/vegetarian option at every meal