

The Gavison-Medan Covenant on Kashrut – Religious Dietary Laws

The Proposal

1. The State of Israel will ensure maximal transparency on the subject of kashrut with regard to the preparation and sale of food products. Deception in matters of kashrut will be categorized as a serious offence. Special effort will be made to increase the effective enforcement of the law.
2. Public kitchens in Israel which serve the Jewish sector (for example, the IDF, schools, government ministries, offices and hospitals) will be kosher.
3. A national licensing authority will be established for matters of kashrut. Its members will be appointed according to professional-administrative criteria, with the approval of the Chief Rabbinate and under the supervision of the Civil Service Commissioner. The authority will be independently financed through fees paid by food manufacturers and marketers. These fees will be price controlled. “Kashrut” in the operations of the national authority will define those foods and components that are permissible to consume according to Jewish law as derived from the “Shulhan Aruch”.
4. No kashrut certificate will be issued to a factory or other establishment by anyone other than the authority or bodies under its authorization. Kashrut inspectors and supervisors will be employed by the authority or bodies under its authorization.
5. The authority will be entitled to classify different levels of kashrut certification, and to issue kashrut confirmation and certificates accordingly.
6. The authority will grant approval to other bodies to issue kashrut certificates in accordance with their customs. Such approval will be granted upon written submission of the list of kashrut requirements and a description of the proposed supervisory mechanism, along with printed kashrut certificates that clearly specify the identity of the body providing the certification. In order to prevent deception, kashrut certificates will be designed so that they are distinguishable from one another. Bodies authorized to issue their own kashrut certificates will include Reform and Conservative organizations. The authority will allocate finances from its own budget to pay for the activities of other approved bodies.
7. The kashrut authority will be forbidden to take into account extraneous considerations in granting kashrut certifications or in supervising any body that provides food to its clients, e.g., it may not deny kashrut certification because a Reform marriage ceremony was performed in the same venue, etc. Desecration of the Sabbath in a catering hall’s kitchen, however, is likely to be legitimate grounds for denying kashrut certification.
8. Official representatives of the State of Israel will be obliged to refrain from eating obviously non-kosher food at official meals in the course of their duties.
9. We see no need to change the existing arrangements concerning the import of non-kosher meat.

Main Points of Ruth Gavison's Explanation

There is no argument over the fact that there must be arrangements enabling people who wish to keep kosher to do so. From my perspective, the only question is why kashrut should be a public issue involving the state. I believe there are three answers to this. **First**, in situations of joint activity, separation is liable to produce waste and to compartmentalize different segments of the population. There is a need for one food system, and it must be kosher. The multiplicity of streams in Judaism mandates that the food system be one that does not exclude the Orthodox (clauses 1-3). **Second**, in overseas venues as well there are contexts in which kashrut is important. Just as Israel's missions around the world refrain from operating on the Sabbath, it is also fitting that they should observe kashrut (clause 8). **Third**, deception in kashrut is fraud. If the law is brought to bear against deceptive advertising, there is no reason not to use it against deception in kashrut (clause 1). Here as well, our proposal explicitly permits a variety of kashrut arrangements reflecting the positions of diverse streams of Judaism, with the main goal being transparency and preventing deception.

Main Points of Yaacov Medan's Explanation

Our proposal (clauses 1, 3 and 4) underscores the importance of full transparency in matters of kashrut, affirms that deception with regard to kashrut is a serious offence, and recommends launching a campaign for effective enforcement in the sphere of kashrut. In taking into account the freedom of every person to eat whatever he pleases, in my judgment it is important to refrain from proscribing a limited quantity of imported non-kosher meat, including pork. From my perspective, it would be appropriate to forbid pig farming in Eretz Israel out of national, not necessarily religious, considerations. We did not reach agreement on this point, and it remains open for public discussion.