

**Rabbinic Members:**

Rabbi Simon Benzaquen  
Rabbi Salamon Cohen-Scali  
Rabbi Mordechai Farkash  
Rabbi Moshe Kletenik  
Rabbi Yechezkel Kornfeld  
Rabbi Sholom Ber Levitin  
Rabbi Solomon Maimon

**Interim Director:**

Al Maimon



בס"ד

## Va'ad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle

June 13, 2008

### Letter to the Community from the Va'ad, Part IV

Last week (You can see previous letters at [www.seattlevaad.org/Communications.html](http://www.seattlevaad.org/Communications.html).) I left you with the following question? How can a reasonable level of confidence be achieved to permit the consumption and use of the products and services of today's modern food industry, at a reasonable expense?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to present a few aspects about the halachic factors that go into determining the acceptable kashruth of a product, service, or facility. If it were required for every moment of operation, every item of production, and every aspect of service that was offered to be personally observed, checked, and validated, then indeed there would be no way to provide kosher certification for the vast majority of contemporary products and services.

On the one hand, the halacha presents a pretty definite set of standards, both biblical and rabbinic, that must be met: laws regarding meat, laws regarding dairy, laws prohibiting the mixing of meat and dairy, wine/ liquor requirements, cooking restraints, bread requirements, special Pesach requirements, etc.

On the other hand, the halacha recognizes practical considerations which permit the use of certain assumptions that, in the presence of confidence and trust, underlie the modern systems of providing certification to so many of today's products and services, and by so many certifying agencies.

[Parenthetically, it should be noted here that there are many kosher supervision agencies. Among them, there are differing practices and applied standards. These factors may combine to create confusion about certification. Also, occasionally there are stories of troubling behaviors which give pause to the community and to the industry, hopefully leading the industry to reevaluate practices and improve performance to maintain the fundamental integrity of the entire process. The Seattle Va'ad needs to be aware of the larger picture for a variety of reasons -- as consumers, as providers of local certification, and as part of the overall network, providing intermediate certification of ingredients used in national products. The Va'ad is increasingly aware of this complexity and the tension of having an eye on the national/international picture while ensuring that the local requirements and circumstances guide the decisions and standards of our local activities. This is one of the more delicate balances the Va'ad attempts to achieve, and it requires great sensitivity and analysis on the part of the Rabbinical leadership.]

The remainder of this article will deal with three factors which permit us to provide the certifications we do at minimum cost. One of these factors is the concept of "**chazaka**"-- loosely translated as the "default condition" -- which permits/requires relying on that default condition until it is changed or is demonstrated to have changed. This can work favorably if we can assume that the initial condition is acceptable -- this minimizes the amount of checking -- but it can also require increased checking if the condition is less than desirable.

Another factor has to do with the environment and "normal" operating conditions and personnel. For example, if the production is automated and simply takes the same input and produces a product with a reliable level of stability, we may be able to dramatically minimize the amount of supervision. Naturally, this depends greatly on the kind of food that is being produced.

The final factor has to do with the amount of required supervision. At one extreme, we have the requirement of supervision 7/24 -- a virtually constant personal presence -- called **mashgiach temidi** (a continuous presence). Less demanding are random visits with varying frequency -- this is called **mashgiach nichnas veyotsei** (a "coming and going" presence). Obviously, costs are greatly reduced if the latter type of supervision is acceptable, with the lower frequency resulting in lower personnel costs. Determining the type and frequency of visit is one of the most important decisions made on an account. One must find the minimum level which adequately ensures conformance

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with Va'ad standards and will allow the mashgiach to find and deal with problems in a timely manner. Clearly, the level of confidence and trust in a relationship with a client is key to finding this balance.

A final word for this installment, from the perspective of the consumer. Hopefully, this series provides information that increases understanding of today's food industry and helps each consumer find satisfactory choices. On the one hand, there has never been more food available to choose from; on the other hand, it has never been more complex and diverse, presenting significant challenges for one to be able to take full advantage of the increased choice. The Rabbis of the Va'ad are committed to increase choice and to provide practical and reliable guidance to community members, from the overall communal point of view and to their specific constituencies as well. To be successful at this endeavor also requires confidence and trust with mutual understanding and respect between the Rabbis and the consumer as well. May we all work toward achieving and maintaining strong links throughout the system.

As always, we are interested in feedback and questions. Specifically, please let us know if you would be interested to learn more about the mechanics and considerations of providing certification locally. You can contact the office (Elise Jacobs or Al Maimon), or one of the Rabbis on the Va'ad (listed above), or a representative lay-person from one of the Va'ad-member synagogues (Eli Pieprz from CSA, Robin Gindin or George Korn from EB, Jake Korn from SBH, Liz Rosen from BCMH, Bess Cox from CSTL).

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Albert Maimon".

Al Maimon  
Interim Director