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בס"ד

Va'ad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle

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Produce Checking

Over the past two years, the Va'ad has been working on a comprehensive policy to address the issue of produce checking and cleaning. This issue actually has been in a dynamic state of change for quite some time as both Kashrut certifiers and consumers around the world have been struggling with how to manage an emerging problem.

All of the factors mentioned in earlier articles (which can be found at www.seattlevaad.org/Communications.html) that are influencing the practices and standards of kashrut have affected this issue in particular. Organic concerns, prohibition of the use of DDT, globalization of the supply chain and other socio-economic and financial factors have changed the nature of the produce business from the grower through the distributor chain and to the end user. In our community, a heightened awareness of the halachic issues surrounding fresh produce with regard to insect problems have contributed to the need for increased attention and the development of specific standards.

The basic concern relates to prohibitions against eating insects, intentionally or inadvertently. This implies that care must be taken when eating produce that no insects are present. The concept of chazaka (default state) is very important here. If a type of produce has a chazaka of not being infested, the level of cleaning and checking is relatively simple. However, halacha requires that fruits and vegetables that are found to be regularly subject to insect infestation (the halachic definition of infestation will be discussed in a future article) must be more rigorously cleaned and checked prior to being eaten. The motivation for this position includes the fact that there are up to six issurim (prohibitions) on a Torah level involved with consuming insects. Obviously, the Va'ad must act in a halachically sound manner to establish procedures that will serve to permit the use of the widest possible range of fruits and vegetables in the kosher kitchen.

The Va'ad has devoted considerable resources into:

- 1) investigating the halachic requirements of produce cleaning and checking;
- 2) investigating the produce supply available locally and any unique impact or mitigation that local sourcing offers;
- 3) instituting a wide-ranging study of the various approaches being employed around the US.

We have maintained close contact with our restaurants and caterers as the process has developed, including conducting quantitative studies looking at patterns of infestation of the fruits and vegetables they are routinely using. Procedures were developed and field-tested in partnership with our food service providers. Our goal was to develop procedures that would meet the requirements of halacha, in accordance with the rulings of our Rabbinical Board, and minimize to the extent possible the impact on the food service providers.

In March 2008, we put into effect a final policy and procedures document, and our mashgichim have fully implemented this policy in all our certified establishments. Since insects tend not to be overly cooperative and predictable, our policy establishes procedures that the mashgiach can adapt to the needs of a particular time, and experience over the last three months has thus far shown that this well thought-out and long planned policy is proving effective.

The purpose of this article is to address the effect of this issue on consumers and to provide information and

guidance as a first step to help understanding and dealing with the situation "at home". We hope to increase the awareness of the reality that insects are found more prevalently at this time than in the past. We will try to provide over the coming weeks a broader halachic overview of this important aspect of kashrut.

It is important that our community look at our personal standards in this area, and seek the guidance of our Rabbis, who are our best resource to guide us in this (as well as all) matters of halacha. In order to assist the community in this aspect, we have prepared a brief guideline meant to reflect the procedures and practices (based on those developed for the establishments) which reflects how one utilizes the Va'ad's standards in the home environment. The attached sheet of produce checking procedures (which is also available online at www.seattlevaad.org) is meant to encompass the various items that we normally come across and can be printed and laminated for your reference. If you have questions as to how these procedures should be implemented in your home, you can call the Va'ad office or your Rabbi.

As always questions and comments are welcome, either pertaining to this specific topic, or on any other Va'ad-related issues.

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