






Sweet-Talk: *Inside the Kosher Bakery* By Yisroel Bendelstein

Ever since antiquity, there has been one innovation after another in the baking industry, some by accident and others by design. During the Exodus, the Torah recounts that *ugot matzot*, or unleavened cakes were unintentionally created. In their haste to leave behind the shackles of Egyptian bondage, the Israelites baked their dough in the desert sun. This resulted in the tradition of eating matzah during Passover. The discovery of a category of breads that are flat and unleavened led to another development: pita bread.

Accordingly, the range of bakery products is nothing less than astonishing: breads, rolls, bagels, baguettes, buns, pizzas, pitas, wraps, croissants, cakes, cookies, crackers, muffins, biscuits, wafers, pies, donuts, scones, crullers, Danishes, pancakes, cereals, pretzels, etcetera. But what exactly distinguishes baked goods from other foods? Two common features to the above are that they all contain flour and are baked, with the exception of donuts and pancakes, which are fried. And yes, in this modern age, there is a wonderful, light pastry that is baked without any flour whatsoever: meringue.

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An Educated Consumer

The OU has kept up with this ever-growing montage of baked products and takes great pains to keep our consumers educated about the relevant kosher symbols. Thus, our consumers know that a standard  indicates that the product is certified kosher pareve,  means kosher dairy (*cholov stam* unless the product specifies that it is *cholov yisroel*) and  signifies kosher for Passover. Many also know that the dairy status of a product is also evident by the  emblem, commonly found on milk and other dairy products. What many may not know, however, is that milk proteins such as whey, caseine or caseinate in the ingredient legend indicate that the product is dairy, *even if the container says non-dairy*, as is the case with many so-called non-dairy creamers. This is because the FDA and *halachah* do not define dairy in the same way. According to the FDA, any product that doesn't contain milk can be marketed as non-dairy, even though it may contain milk derivatives. *Halachah* considers such a product dairy. Consumers should therefore check for the  on "non-dairy" creamers to determine if they are dairy or not.

What's in a Cracker?

One of the challenges in certifying baked goods is the number of ingredients the average commercial bakery uses. It is not unusual for a bakery to use 500 ingredients, and many store

over 1,000. Ingredients that need to be carefully monitored include oils, shortenings, flavors, emulsifiers, stabilizers, enzymes, glycerin, gelatin, grape juice, whey and cheese. Moreover, the sources of these ingredients—and

If the breads, pastries and cookies displayed are not in sealed packages, they are not to be considered kosher.

oftentimes the ingredients themselves—are in a state of flux. Bakeries under OU supervision are forbidden to use or store any ingredient without prior approval from the OU. Approved ingredients are subsequently registered on an official OU document and used by our rabbinic field representatives (RFRs) to ensure the integrity of the company's kosher program.

Parenthetically, the OU will not certify a product as kosher if the facility where it is produced maintains both kosher and non-kosher versions of one or more of the product's ingredients. An example of this would be a cheese cracker—made with kosher cheddar cheese—that won't receive certification because non-kosher cheddar cheese is used in the same facility for a non-kosher product. Similarly, the OU will


not certify a product as pareve if the facility stores a dairy ingredient that may accidentally be used in the pareve product. Hence, a chocolate chip cookie that is made with pareve chocolate chips will not be certified pareve if a dairy chocolate chip is used in the same plant for another product.

In view of this, even products that aren't OU certified are still integral to the kosher program. Thus, if a company decides to change the formula of one of its products—even if the product is not certified kosher—the OU will need to review the list of ingredients. This policy is especially relevant to bakeries who constantly test new recipes in order to develop new products.


How the Rework Works


To maximize efficiency, many bakeries "rework" surplus dough or batter from one product for use in another. (It's like using leftover pasta from one meal for a tuna casserole at another.) While this rework is comparable to its "parent" in texture, color and taste, there can be kosher concerns. Bakeries may rework dough from a dairy product for use in a pareve one or rework non-kosher dough for use in a kosher product. The OU uses a variety of controls to prevent such situations from occurring.

Getting Equipped


The kosher status of a product depends on the equipment as well as the ingredients used. The OU doesn't use the DE (dairy equipment) designation, and therefore products made on dairy equipment (even pareve ones) are considered dairy and must be labeled . OU bakeries must inform the OU when purchasing new or used equipment. The rabbinic coordinator (RC) who manages the kosher program for that bakery will review the information on the equipment, devise a procedure to *kasher* it and direct the *kashering* with the RFR on a visit to the plant.

Looking for Labels

Only OU-certified facilities are allowed to affix the  to their products.

Thus, loose labels bearing the  cannot be affixed at a non-OU-certified facility, even if the product itself was manufactured in an OU plant. In a similar vein, consumers should be careful when purchasing goods at supermarket bakery counters that display an OU Letter of Kosher Certification. If the breads, pastries and cookies displayed are not in sealed packages, they are not to be considered kosher (unless the bakery counter itself is under a reliable kosher supervision). This is why the OU Letter of Kosher Certification clearly states that products are "kosher when bearing the symbol."

The Bread and Butter of Kosher

One more caveat with regard to labels involves bread products. Kosher law precludes bread from being dairy or meat; it must be pareve. This is because as a staple, bread should be readily available for either a dairy or meat meal. This applies to all forms of breads such as rolls, bagels and buns as well as dry bread mixes. Interestingly, pizza dough can be certified  because by definition pizza is a dairy food. While we're on the subject of bread, it should be noted that more and more kosher consumers are becoming scrupulous about eating only *pas Yisrael*—which literally means the "bread of a Jew." To ensure that baked goods are *pas Yisrael*, an observant Jew must ignite the oven in which the product is being baked. The OU recommends a device called the "Shain System," named after the inventor, Rabbi Yehuda Shain of Lakewood, New Jersey. This technique involves installing an electric panel that will enable the oven to be turned on by an RFR (who is not in the bakery) using a remote control telephone hook-up. This system meets the strictest halachic requirements and has received the approbation of leading rabbinic authorities.

As the popular saying goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Commercial bakeries are constantly developing new, innovative products using the latest in technology to satisfy the needs of the burgeoning kosher market. The laws of kosher as outlined in our timeless Torah are incredibly adept in keeping up with these innovations. 