

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



Va'ad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle

May 16, 2008

Letter to the Community from the Va'ad II

In our ongoing effort to increase communication with the community and to provide a better understanding about the Kashrut aspects of the Va'ad's work, we are continuing a series of "papers" to explain how the Va'ad operates and works with others to bring increased kosher options to our community. In the [first issue](#), we briefly described the various types of certification activity provided and some major factors of the financial workings of the Va'ad.

Continuing the description of the Va'ad, its environment and how it works, it is instructive to consider what the Va'ad's mission is, who its partners are, and who its customers are. This article will be focused on these factors from the kashrut point of view.

The mission of the Va'ad is to enable increased choices for the community in kosher products and services. The Va'ad attempts to accomplish this mission in a variety of ways. One main service of the Va'ad is to provide information about kashrut and availability of kosher products and services to the kosher consumer. Another service is to provide certification of certain kosher products and services provided by various establishments. These establishments can be retail establishments which deal directly with the consumer; alternatively, they could be industrial establishments making intermediate products -- in the food chain, so to speak. A main aspect of this service is to decide on a policy, standard, and practice that is appropriate for our community and which conforms to the Va'ad's standards.

The Va'ad has a web site, sends out a weekly e-newsletter, hosts occasional lectures and "field trips" on various kashruth related subjects, and is available by phone or e-mail for specific questions.

The Va'ad has a staff of mashgichim who are trained in various aspects of kashrut so that they can effectively supervise and certify as to the kashrut of a wide variety of products and services. Another article will focus on the topic of supervision - standards, policies, practices, partnerships, etc.

There are several complicating factors that impact the definition of the services provided and the successful achievement of the Va'ad's mission. First of all, who is the consumer which the Va'ad aspires to serve? Our community is blessed with a fairly wide spectrum of practice and customs and the Va'ad aspires to serve the full range of the community. This leads to divergent decisions made on the kashrut standards for some items. Some feel that the way to do this is to take the most stringent view in each matter -- that is, every Va'ad-certified event, establishment, or product conforms to the most stringent standards so everyone can partake of all Va'ad-certified items and events. This approach is not the one used by the Va'ad for a variety of reasons. Instead, all the Rabbis deliberate, discuss, and decide on those items where there are such issues and determine a community-wide standard that guides the Va'ad's actions. This decision may be more stringent than some, more lenient than others - but it is judged to be the right position for the community as a whole. For these matters, it is up to community members to consult with their Rabbis to determine appropriate individual practice. The Va'ad attempts to clearly state the policy and to mention implications of the decision.

Examples of such issues include *chalav yisrael*, *bishul yisrael*, *glatt* (contemporary meaning of the term) meat, and *kitniot* and other items on Pesach.

In Seattle, as elsewhere, there are individual consumers to serve. There are also institutional clients - Jewish organizations who host events that include food. This means that there is a large segment of the Jewish community whose individual practices may not be guided by the Va'ad, but communally the agreement is to conform to the Va'ad's standards.



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Another aspect of this matter is that there are literally hundreds of certifying agencies worldwide. There is a need to understand the various standards used in each case to determine whether or not an item or certification symbol is recommended. This is a very complicated and dynamic issue. The kashrut industry is in a constant state of flux due to economic, technological, agricultural, transportation, and food chemistry changes.

The Va'ad's approach to this issue is to take guidance from the big national agencies (e.g., OU, OK, Kof-K, Star-K, CRC) and follow their lead. If they are all in agreement, that usually (by not always) determines the Va'ad's standard. If there are differing opinions amongst the national agencies, the Va'ad then has to "take a position". Not only does this issue play out in service to the local consumer, the Va'ad must also take into consideration whether or not there is a likelihood of other (non-local) consumers coming into contact with our certifications. It also is important if we are certifying an intermediate product that will feed into a product certified by another agency.

To summarize, the customer ranges from local or visiting consumers, communal institutions, other food companies, and other certifying agencies. This mix requires a great deal of sensitivity and flexibility while defining and adhering to the most appropriate standards of kashrut. It is the job of the Rabbinic Board to carefully sort through these matters and balance the variety of community needs within a halachic framework.

As always please let us know your questions or comments and we'll gladly respond, personally or publically. 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 (Elie Pieprz from CSA, Robin Gindin or George Korn from EB, Jake Korn from SBH, Liz Rosen from BCMH, Bess Cox from CSTL).

Stay tuned for the next installment in this series...

Al Maimon
 Interim Director