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Magen Tzedek Responds to Agudath Israel

May 5, 2011 (New York, NY) - The misleading statement by Agudath Israel concerning Magen Tzedek is a misrepresentation of a very important development in kosher food production in America. Magen Tzedek is based on our assertion that biblical and rabbinic law mandate fair treatment of workers (בל תלין), humane treatment of animals (צער בעלי חיים) and care of the earth (שמירת הארץ and בל תשחית) which can be translated into measurable standards applicable to commercial food production. These standards were developed in collaboration with SAAS, an organization acknowledged worldwide for its expertise in ethical certification programs.

We are appalled that Agudath Israel sees in ethical certification for kosher food an effort that “corrupts *halakhab*.” All Jews recognize that Judaism is a religion built upon ethical precepts. A central purpose of Jewish observance is to make us more decent and moral people, more capable of carrying out God’s vision of a just world.

We flatly reject Agudath Israel’s false accusations that we “harbor no respect for the very concept of *halakhab*.” We have always maintained that the Magen Tzedek would only be awarded to products *already bearing kosher certification*. Yet, maintain *that mitzvot bein adam l'makom* (commandments between humanity and God) do not take precedence over *mitzvot bein adam l'havero* (commandments between one person and another).

Maimonides said that in fulfillment of Jewish life “one must be strict in their behavior and still go beyond the letter of the law (לפנים משורת הדין). We see our role as ensuring that such is the case in the production of kosher food. Just as we would never delegate to the government to determine what constitutes proper kashrut certification, neither should we leave to the government enforcement of Jewish norms regarding ethical behavior. Instead of dismissing the work of one another, we call on all Jews to work together to ensure that our actions are truly a *kiddush hashem*--a sanctification of God's name.

Magen Tzedek affirms the eternal wisdom of Torah by bringing the moral values of Jewish religious tradition to bear on the daily operations of industrial food production, bringing more Jews to value the beauty of kashrut and Jewish observance assuring that we feel truly fulfilled when we sit down around our tables for a meal.