

IS A *K* KOSHER?

Rabbi Kassel Abelson

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The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

שאלה

Questions have been raised about a *K* symbol on food products. Does a *K* on a food container signify that a rabbinic authority has granted the product in that container a certification of compliance with the laws of kashrut? Can one be sure that a food producer/packager cannot print a *K* on the container without such authority? Does the Rabbinical Assembly have a list of acceptable products bearing a *K*?

תשובה

A *K*, which is often found on food packages, is not the symbol of a particular rabbi or kashrut organization. It is a letter of the alphabet, and under American law a letter may not be trademarked. There are over fifty rabbis (including Conservative rabbis) or agencies that use a *K* to signify that a product is kosher. The standards of kashrut will vary, depending on the particular rabbi or agency and the rabbinic פוסק (authority) followed. Even where there is a state law that governs kashrut, the state will not get involved in a dispute in the religious Jewish community as to which פוסק determines whether a food is kosher. And this applies equally to all kosher symbols.

The State of New York requires that any kashrut symbol, including a *K*, must be backed by a supervising rabbi or agency and be registered with the New York State Department of Agriculture. Hence most food products that are distributed nationally would also be distributed in New York State and would have kashrut supervision. It is, however, conceivable that a manufacturer might put a *K* on the package without having proper kashrut supervision. This could be the case in California, where no rabbinical supervision is necessary for a food supplier to put *K* on a food product. However, the consumer fraud

laws would be invoked against a food producer who marked a food product with a *K* knowing that it was not kosher (See letter from Herschel T. Elkins, Senior Assistant Attorney General of the State of California, dated June 25, 1993, and memo from Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff dated June 30, 1993).

The Rabbinical Assembly does not presently maintain a list of food products that are certified to be kosher, whether bearing a *K*, the O-U, or any other kashrut symbol.

Conclusion

The presence of a *K* on a food product does not necessarily mean that the food is kosher. It is important to check to see whether a particular food product bearing a *K* has been rabbinically certified. In most cases a copy of the **הכשר** will be sent together with the name of the supervising rabbi. If desired, additional information can be obtained from the rabbi about the standards used in supervising the food product.