



HECHSHER



TZEDEK



Hekhsher Tzedek: Connecting Halakhah to Social Justice

*A Joint Project of the Rabbinical Assembly and the
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism*

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The Hekhsher Tzedek Draft Policy Statement and Working Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The Hekhsher Tzedek Committee understands that the development of criteria for the Hekhsher Tzedek, as well as means for measuring these criteria, must be undertaken through a careful and deliberate process. To assist us in establishing an overall policy statement that will frame the Hekhsher Tzedek project and to establish working guidelines for the development of criteria and measurements, we have commissioned an outside consulting firm, KLD Research and Analytics, Inc. (www.kld.com). According to the website, “KLD is the leading authority on social research and indexes for institutional investors. Since 1988, institutional investors, managers, trustees, consultants and advisors have depended on the quality and expertise of KLD. Today, 33 of the top 50 institutional money managers worldwide use KLD’s research to integrate environmental, social and governance factors into their investment decisions.”

What follows is a working draft of a Policy Statement and Working Guidelines for the development of criteria for the Hekhsher Tzedek. This represents a summary of the KLD work to date. We are continuing our work with KLD to determine the detailed and measurable standards that will be established in each category, and are working with industry leaders, both labor and management, as well as other experts in the fields covered by the standards to ensure that they are fair and rational. This work is complemented by the development of a halakhic framework for the standards prepared by Rabbi Avram Reisner.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Hekhsher Tzedek will indicate that a kosher product was made in compliance with a set of social justice criteria, in keeping with the teachings of the Jewish faith. In order to qualify for the Hekhsher Tzedek, a product must have been produced in a way that aligns with a set of standards regarding Wages and Benefits; Employee Health and Safety/Employee Training; Product Development; Corporate Transparency and Integrity; and Environmental Impact. Compliance will be assessed, as applicable and wherever possible, at the level of the facility where the product was manufactured, although overall company performance will also be taken into account.

The qualifying process will take a multi-faceted approach. Data will be collected in a disciplined process from independent sources of information, including governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media, as well as from the companies whose products are under consideration for the Hekhsher. Engagement with companies, workers and other stakeholders will play a key role in the process, as Hekhsher certification will require a detailed knowledge of company/facility policies, procedures and performance. Transparency and a willingness to enter into dialogue with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), and their partners will therefore be essential for a company’s products to qualify for the Hekhsher Tzedek.

WORKING GUIDELINES

The following criteria serve to define the Hekhsher Tzedek Policy Statement and provide details for its implementation.

Wages and Benefits

Companies must offer fair wages and benefits to all employees. The following indicators will be used to assess compliance with these criteria:

- Worker Pay
- Health Insurance
- Retirement Benefits
- Vacation
- Sick Leave
- Maternity Leave
- Right to Organize

Employee Health and Safety/Employee Training

Companies must provide a safe and healthy workplace to all employees as well as adequate language-appropriate training regarding occupational hazards. The following indicators will be used to assess compliance with these criteria:

- Violations, Fines and Penalties
- Lost-time incident rate
- Safety Inspection
- Awards and Certification
- Safety Management Systems
- Employee Turnover

Product Development

Companies must offer quality products and services, and market them responsibly. Companies that work with animals should have policies and practices in place to ensure they are treated humanely at all points of the production cycle. The following indicators will be used to assess compliance with these criteria:

- Animal Welfare Policies
- Product Marketing and Safety
- Quality Management Systems

Corporate Transparency and Integrity

Companies must operate transparently and with integrity, respecting ethical standards of conduct and corporate governance. Companies will be favored for the Hekhsher if they exhibit strong

Corporate Social Responsibility reporting practices and demonstrate a willingness to engage in a productive dialogue with the USCJ/RA. The following indicators will be used to assess compliance with these criteria:

- Corporate Governance
- Accounting Practices
- Transparency

Environmental Impact

Companies will be favored for the Hekhsher if they employ strong environmental management systems and demonstrate a commitment to the environment through the adoption of proactive environmental initiatives. The following indicators will be used to assess compliance with these criteria:

- Public Record
- Regulatory Reporting
- Hazardous Waste
- Toxic Emissions
- Environmental Management Systems
- Environmental Initiatives

KEY MESSAGES

What is Hekhsher Tzedek?

- Hekhsher Tzedek translates to mean “justice certification.”
- Hekhsher Tzedek is seal that will be placed on **already designated** kosher products, reflecting production benchmarks consistent with Jewish ethical standards.
- The Hekhsher Tzedek seal is granted when producers of kosher food adhere to standards in five separate categories:
 - wages and benefits
 - health, safety and training
 - environmental impact
 - product development
 - corporate transparency
- The Hekhsher Tzedek evaluation process is uniform, objective and verifiable.
- Hekhsher Tzedek is not a replacement for the kosher designation, but rather an accompanying seal.
- The Hekhsher Tzedek seal is voluntary. Companies that meet the five benchmark standards to earn a Hekhsher Tzedek designation can choose to place the seal on their product but are not obligated to do so.

Connection to Judaism

- Hekhsher Tzedek was created by the Conservative Judaism movement and is a shared initiative of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.
- Hekhsher Tzedek will demonstrate that both ritual and ethical commandments have an equal place at Jewish tables and that isolating one at the expense of the other does a disservice to Jewish tradition and the meaning of keeping kosher.
- A Hekhsher Tzedek seal that accompanies kosher-designated foods can have appeal for any member of the Jewish community regardless of whether s/he keeps kosher. In fact, by reminding people of the thought process behind the designation of kosher foods, the Hekhsher Tzedek movement has the potential to encourage even more Jewish people to follow the laws of kashrut.
- Hekhsher Tzedek is inspired by a passage from Deuteronomy 24, verses 14-15; “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger.”

Why is a Hekhsher Tzedek necessary? (Aren't there other agencies that are responsible for monitoring business practices in these areas?)

- While there are government agencies tasked with ensuring the fair and ethical treatment of workers, unfortunately this doesn't always happen. Because of the ethical commandment of Jewish law to adhere to these standards, Hekhsher Tzedek provides an additional safeguard to ensure these standards are being met.
- Hekhsher Tzedek provides another way to connect all Jews to the meaning behind the laws of kashrut.
- This movement began as a response to reports and accounts of production cycle practices in companies that produce kosher food that were found to be contrary to Jewish law and ethics.

Connection to the broader community

- Because the Hekhsher Tzedek seal affirms a food producer's adherence to five “social justice” standards, it will appeal to socially conscious consumers within and beyond the Jewish community.
- The ethical treatment of workers is an issue that transcends religious affiliation.