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Why more people are eating kosher

By [Randy Shore](#) 3 Mar 2010 [COMMENTS\(5\)](#) [The Green Man](#)

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If you care about what you put into your body, it makes sense to trust the toughest food inspectors on the planet.

And believe me, there is no one tougher than the global network of rabbis who determine what is and is not kosher, visiting processing plants, working with slaughterhouses and tracing ingredients all the way back to the field, patiently and carefully.

At its core, kosher means pure and healthy, said Rabbi Eli Lando, who runs BCK, B.C.'s non-profit Orthodox kosher certification agency. "It's a trademark of trust. People believe that when they buy a kosher product that they are buying a better and healthier product."

The rules that dictate what is and isn't kosher are a complex mix of scriptural instruction and oral tradition passed down through the centuries, but chief among the central values of kosher food preparation is cleanliness and it is a standard well beyond that of government food inspection rules.

Sustainably caught fish and organically grown foods find favour with kosher certification agencies.

"We want fish to be caught and killed naturally," Lando said. "For things grown in the earth, we don't want to see pesticides or chemicals. We go and look to see how they do it."



The BCK rabbis don't do it for the money, charging only enough to cover costs. They do it because food matters.

It matters to a lot of people, it seems, and not just Jews. Kosher is the fastest growing claim of quality sought for food products in the U.S. and sales of kosher foods by some accounts are rising by up to 20 per cent a year in Canada. In the U.S. kosher food sales are up 65 per cent since 2003, according to the market research firm Mintel, which also reports that 28 per cent of new food and drink products launched last year bore a kosher

certification. A report Mintel produced in 2009 says that only about 15 per cent of kosher food sales are for religious reasons, with concerns about food safety leading the list of reasons to buy kosher.

British Columbians are on board consuming about 65 per cent of the organic food sold in this country, according to Lando. "People in B.C. care about what they put into their bodies. They want to know what goes into those products and they buy kosher so they can be sure."

"The growth I've seen in the past five-and-a-half years has been incredible," he said. Jews are only a fraction of the kosher market, he said. "Muslims buy kosher, other religions buy kosher, Seventh Day Adventists."

People who suffer from food allergies and sensitivities to such things as shellfish, dairy, eggs or wheat look to kosher for certainty that packaged and prepared foods will be free of any ingredient sourced from those things, Lando explained. Manufactured products may have dozens of ingredients with unfamiliar names, but nothing can go into a kosher certified product until some tough rabbi somewhere knows exactly what it is and where it came from.

"If a producer in B.C. uses something that comes from Argentina I can call a rabbi there and ask him to visit the plant where it is made," Lando said.

Under kosher rules foods break down into three categories: meat, dairy and pareve (neutral). Meat and dairy are never produced or consumed together. Kosher certified pareve products contain no meat or dairy and so may be consumed with either meat or dairy (but not both at one sitting) by kosher-observant Jews. For the rest of us, pareve means absolutely certainly meat and dairy free, which is the kind of assurance vegetarians and people with lactose intolerance seek.

"That's why kosher is taking over," said Lando. "It means that a rabbi is standing behind it saying yes, we thoroughly checked this product, we been there and we know it's good." BCK clients in B.C. include Canada Safeway Ltd, Rogers Sugar, Golden Boy Foods Inc, Dan-D Foods Ltd, Bakemark Ingredients Canada Ltd, Canadian Fishing Company and Flora Manufacturing & Distributing Ltd.

Kosher Food Warehouse owner Steve Hertzman will be going full out for the next few weeks supplying the Passover rush. Religious occasions are a time when Jews who are not strictly observant do go kosher, but Hertzman says they aren't the only ones who stock up at Passover.

The number of non-Jewish customers at KFW goes up during Passover, mainly people looking for wheat and soy-free products such as chocolate, cookies and margarine that are only available during Passover, he said.

"It's a time when people who have wheat or soy allergies to load up for the year," Hertzman said. "We get a lot of calls and e-mails from people asking when the margarine will arrive."

People with dietary restrictions have a much easier time finding what they need in the world of kosher food, but many people are attracted just by the promise of higher quality. "We are noticing a lot more non-Jewish customers asking about kosher meat," Hertzman said. Kosher meats and poultry — selected and humanely slaughtered according to scriptural rules, salted, washed and processed under strict guidelines for cleanliness — are his top sellers year round.

"Some people think that the way kosher beef and poultry are slaughtered is more ethical,"

said Hertzman. Just as important is the standard for selecting which animals may be deemed kosher.

“Any sign of physical abuse, bruising, broken bones or ill health means the animal will be rejected for kosher slaughter,” he explained. Even after slaughter an animal may be rejected if it shows any sign of distress or disease in the traditional 70-point inspection. Specially-trained rabbis, or their approved proxies called shochets, ritually slaughter the animals and inspect the carcasses and the offal, especially the lungs.

It’s a tough standard. Up to 60 per cent of beef delivered for kosher slaughter may be rejected, Hertzman said.

The [Green Man Blog](#) is on Twitter and so is his dog, [Waker](#).