Kosher food certification in Australia: a quick guide

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This quick guide provides an overview of Kosher food certification in Australia. It complements the quick guide on Halal certification.

**Kosher**

Kashrut is a body of Jewish law that prescribes what foods can and cannot be eaten, and how they must be prepared and eaten. Kosher foods are those that meet the standards of Kashrut and hence are ‘fit’ or ‘proper’.

**What is permitted?**

Kashrut dietary laws are extensive and share a number of similarities with Halal. In relation to meat, if it is derived from an animal that has cloven hooves and chews its cud, it is permitted. Examples of kosher animals in this category are sheep, cattle, and goats. However, to be eaten, the animal must be slaughtered in accordance with a ritual Jewish slaughtering method called shechitah. Shechitah involves a ritual slaughterer (a shochet) using an extremely sharp knife to slit the animal’s throat and sever the trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries, jugular veins and vagus nerve in one quick action. The blood must also be drained or removed from the animal before it is consumed (there are exceptions in relation to fish). The goal of shechitah is to minimise the pain experienced by the animal before dying and to cause almost instantaneous unconsciousness and death.

**What is prohibited?**

There are basic principles which determine if a food is prohibited. First, certain animals (for example, pigs) are forbidden from being eaten. The meat, eggs, milk and other derivatives of these animals (such as gelatine) fall within this restriction. Second, eating birds and mammals is prohibited if not slaughtered in accordance with shechitah. Third, some parts of permitted animals may not be consumed. Other prohibitions include the consumption of meat with dairy products and the consumption of grape products made by non-Jews. More information about Kosher foods can be found at:

- the NSW-based Kashrut Authority—provides a guide to Kosher foods as well as information about Kosher certification
- the UK-based KIR (a Kosher certification authority)—provides a guide to Kosher dietary rules and regulations as does the US-based Jewish Virtual Library and
- the Chabad.org website (a Jewish information portal)—provides a range of information on Kosher products, including wine and grape products.

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Why is food certified as Kosher?

Food certification organisations ensure that strict standards are met by producers or manufacturers before they are entitled to label their food with the relevant certification trade mark. Non-religious examples of certification standards include those for organic food, free range eggs, and perhaps the best known, the Australian Made certification. Producers and manufacturers obtain certification to more effectively market their products to consumers.

As with other food certification systems, to be considered Kosher, food must meet the rules laid down by the organisation from which the food producer or manufacturer is seeking certification. Once the relevant standards are met, the food can then be packaged and marketed as having been certified as Kosher by that organisation.

Australia’s Jewish population was estimated in 2011 to be 112,000 people, constituting 0.5% of the Australian population. By certifying food as Kosher, Australian producers are better able to cater for that portion of the domestic market, and may also find the certification useful for exporting to Israel and the United States.1

Who can certify food as Kosher?

As with other food certification systems, a range of different Kosher certifying organisations exist in Australia.

Kosher certification

Kosher food certification within Australia occurs through the three main bodies, the Kashrut Authority of Australia and New Zealand (based in NSW), Kosher Australia (based in Victoria) and Kashrut Authority of Western Australia. However the Senate Economics References Committee (the Committee) noted in its 2015 report on third party certification of food that:

...no certification authorities operate in Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania or the Australian Capital Territory, reflecting the distribution of Australia's Jewish population. In states without certification authorities, the local Jewish communities rely on kosher supervision undertaken by the local rabbis, and will often source specialised kosher products from NSW and Victoria.

What is the certification process?

As with other certification processes, Kosher certification follows a series of steps:

1. The relevant food producer or manufacturer applies to the relevant certifying organisation (for example, Kosher Australia). This usually involves providing detailed information about the raw materials, ingredients and additives, and the manufacturing process.

2. An inspection of the manufacturing site is then conducted by an appropriately qualified person on behalf of the certifying organisation to determine whether all the relevant requirements are consistently being met, and a report is prepared. The applicant may be required to alter their manufacturing processes or ingredients, or to provide further information about their supply chain.

3. A certification agreement is then concluded between the applicant and the certifying body, and Kosher accreditation or certification is awarded for a period of time.

Does Kosher certification increase costs to consumers?

The cost of obtaining Kosher certification varies depending on the product involved, the organisation from which certification is sought, whether the goods are for export or domestic consumption and the type of accreditation sought. However, the fees are often modest.

For example, the Kashrut Authority charges between $500 and $2,200 for domestic certification and between $2,200 and $6,600 for export certification. Kosher Australia charges between $1,500 and $3,000 for domestic certification. As a result, for large-scale manufacturing the cost of certification in the context of overall manufacturing, advertising and distribution costs has little, if any, impact on a product’s price.

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What are certification funds used for?
The funds raised from certification applications can be used for a variety of purposes beyond the payment of usual business expenses such as salaries, taxes and superannuation. This can include providing funds for a variety of charitable and community causes.

Recent inquires
In 2015 the Committee conducted an inquiry into, and reported on, third party food certification. As part of that process, issues around Kosher certification were examined and the Committee recommended that ‘meat processors clearly label products sourced from animals subject to religious slaughter’. As of the time of writing, it does not appear that this recommendation has been implemented.