

Kosher Meat

Elizabeth Boyle, Ph.D.
Department of Animal Sciences and Industry
Kansas State University
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Meat that is labeled as kosher has undergone a religious form of inspection. The term kosher is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "clean, fit or properly prepared." Kosher inspection has its origins in the Jewish dietary code described in the original five books of the Holy Scriptures. This knowledge was later recorded in the Talmud, a collection of ancient writings that form the basis of religious authority for traditional Judaism. Following the rules described in the Talmud ensures that meat is religiously clean and acceptable for consumption.

Meat to be koshered must come from animals that have split hooves and chew their cud. Because of this requirement, cattle and sheep are the primary livestock used for kosher processing. Hogs are not used because they are not cud chewing animals. Kosher slaughter is performed by a specially trained scholar of Jewish dietary laws, called the "shochet." Carcasses are examined by the shochet for specific defects. Those passing examination are marked in Hebrew with the date of slaughter and the name of the shochet or rabbi. This stamp acknowledges that a carcass is proper and clean according to the Talmud. Although kosher inspection does not meet requirements of federal meat inspection laws, kosher meat processed in federal or state inspected plants undergoes normal inspection procedures by federal or state inspectors in addition to kosher inspection.

After kosher slaughter, meat must be "koshered" before it becomes acceptable for consumption. The process of koshering removes any blood that may remain in meat. To kosher a beef carcass, only the forequarter is used. Although there is no Biblical prohibition against the use of a whole carcass, the process of deveining beef is less complex in the forequarter. First, veins, arteries and certain nonacceptable fats are removed from meat by highly trained specialists. After deveining, the meat is soaked in cold water, salted, then allowed to drain for a period of time to aid in the removal of blood from the meat. Following the draining process, the meat is rinsed in cold water. Meats must be washed every 72 hours following slaughter until koshered. If beef is not koshered by the 13th day after slaughter, it becomes non-kosher. Once koshered, meat can be held refrigerated or frozen until used.

Processed kosher meat products cannot contain dairy products. The use of milk proteins or dairy-based meat binders is forbidden. Another role of a kosher inspector is to make sure that only suitable non-meat ingredients are permitted to be used in processed kosher meat products.