



a URJ Biennial Initiative

Synagogue Food Policies: A Guide for Study and Decision-Making

“Reform Jews are ethically aware, ecologically aware, and sensitive to matters of physical and spiritual health. We know that our Jewish tradition speaks to these issues, and that our youth groups and young people care deeply about them. At such times, Reform Judaism does not remain silent.”

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President, URJ, November 2009

Introduction

Reform Judaism teaches us that individuals and communities should consistently re-examine the choices that we make. This guide suggests a process of study and informed communal decision-making to assist congregations in considering, adopting, and maintaining workable guidelines for food and food-related products and practices, both within and beyond the temple building. These guidelines are based on the principles of congregational autonomy and self-determination.

Unless an institution has reviewed and revised its dietary policies within the last five years, nearly every congregation can benefit from updating such guidelines.

As Reform Jews, we are not required to observe the traditional dietary rules. But we are required to consider the implications of our food choices, a task that mandates study and review of the sources in our tradition that delineate both ethical concerns and traditional laws of *kashrut*. This brief guide suggests a five-step approach to developing workable food policies for Reform synagogues. In most synagogues, this work will be effectively accomplished by a working group or committee composed of between six and 18 individuals who study the issue and propose guidelines.

Session 1: From farm to table

An initial meeting can include a trip to a local supermarket, farm, or farmers' market, during which individuals can begin conversations about food and ethical eating, and health issues, family food traditions, and more. You can find a complete guided food site visit program here (<http://urj.org/life/food>).

Questions to guide discussion during your food site visit include:

1. What most surprised you during your visit?
2. How often do you think about where your food comes from?
3. It is often said that Judaism is, at its root, an agricultural religion. Do you think this is still true in your lives today? How do the Jewish holidays help us connect with the agricultural seasons and calendar?

4. How can people benefit by visiting places where food is produced? What is the benefit of eating local? Do you think these activities reflect Jewish values?
5. Did the produce you saw on the farm (or at the farmers' market) look different than the fruits and vegetables you buy in your grocery store?

Session 2: Living our Values/ Ethical Eating

At your second meeting, you may begin by reviewing your congregation's mission statement and discussing the attitudes, beliefs and values that shape the consideration of Jewish practice on social issues. After reviewing the congregation's mission statement, brainstorm values that may inform your work together on food policy. This exercise will facilitate the identification of standards that will be helpful in crafting food policies that exemplify the most important values of your congregation.

The following list¹ may be useful to a convener or facilitator in helping focus the discussion. (Some of these values are explored in greater detail below.) Spend a few minutes reviewing this list individually, and as a group, and create a 'short list' of the Jewish values that most members of your working group find important.

Love	Humility	We were Slaves in Egypt
Service	Avoiding Waste	Health and Wellness
Not Wasting Time	Covenant	Created in the Image of God
Paths of Peace	Democracy	Connection to God
Diversity	Egalitarianism	Truth/Integrity
Land of Israel	Fidelity	Environmentalism
Covenanted Caring	Gratitude	Beautifying Jewish Observance
Inclusion	Jewish Authenticity	Intention
Holiness	Human Dignity	Commitment to Community
Jewish Learning	<i>Menschlichkeit</i>	Unity/Survival of the Jewish People
Rest and Renewal	Obligation	Physical Pleasure
Pluralism	Compassion/Mercy	Be Fruitful and Multiply
Peace at Home	Protecting the Body	Preserving the Chain of Tradition
Guarding the Speech	Joy and Celebration	Spirituality
Improving the World	Social Justice	Prevention of Pain to Animals
Modesty	Awe of God	The Earth and all that is in it belong to God

The conversation can then continue, exploring the congregational dietary implications of the values you have identified.

This would be an appropriate time to begin exploring "ethical *kashrut*" or "eco-*kashrut*." Beginning in the late 1970s, progressive Jews began speaking about "ethical *kashrut*," also called "eco-*kashrut*," a reconsideration of Jewish dietary guidelines in light of a range of concerns including but not limited to the use of pesticides and growth hormones, the conditions in which animals are raised, the working conditions for farm workers and food processors, and more.²

Traditionally, laws of *kashrut*, (literally, that which is "fit") provide guidelines for Jewish eating. The approach of "ethical *kashrut*" suggests that what we eat can expand upon the

paradigms established by traditional *kashrut*. “Ethical *kashrut*,” or “ethical Jewish eating” encourages us to think of every food choice we make in the context of values that are part of our conscience and/or our Jewish tradition.

Here is a list of traditional Jewish values that can help us make appropriate food choices for ourselves, our families, and our congregations.³ Let us consider:

Respect for animals צער בעלי חיים

(*Tza'ar ba'alei chayim*: literally, distress of those who possess life) For some, this suggests abstaining from the flesh of poultry or animals raised in “factory farm” conditions. For others, this value supports vegetarianism. Others extend the concept to honoring plant life, and restricting the use of fruits and vegetables treated with pesticides or foods that have been genetically manipulated.

Protecting one's own body שמירת הגוף

(*Shmirat Haguf*) This value guides us to abstain from foods with carcinogens or dangerous levels of hormones, and to consume alcohol, caffeine and tobacco in healthy moderation. This value also reminds us of the dangers of eating disorders, which make food into a weapon that we use against ourselves.

Fair distribution of food צדקה

(*Tzedakah*) Practices that reflect this value include recognizing our bounty by sharing with those who would otherwise go hungry, providing free meals at our synagogue, and donating a portion of our celebrations to Mazon or other hunger organizations.

Sanctifying the act of eating ברכה/קדושה

(*Brachah and Kedushah*) When we eat, our tradition urges us to express gratitude by acknowledging the sources of our food, including celebrating the process and the journey from farm to table.

Pursue peace and justice רדף שלום וצדק

(*Rodef Shalom v'Tzedek*) This value guides us to avoid food produced by companies or countries that violate values of fair pay, decent working conditions, and more.

Session 3: Our Reform Heritage: Continuing a Tradition of Informed and Intentional Choice

During your third session, your group will review several Platforms of the Reform Movement over time, and discuss how our historical stances as a Movement intersect with our contemporary conversations about ethical eating. You will see how the Reform Movement has viewed dietary policy over time and have an opportunity to discuss whether you agree with these various Reform views on dietary restrictions and policies for communal eating in Reform Jewish settings. Taken together, these documents can inform grounded, solid decisions for your congregation.⁴

Though the considerations and values that we look to today may differ from those highlighted by our Movement's policies in the past, our historical tradition provides an important starting point for this discussion, as we work to make informed, Jewish decisions about food policy. As you examine and discuss these policies, consider how they apply to contemporary congregational life, and if there are particular pieces with which you do or do not agree.

TEXT 1: An Excerpt from the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885

We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct rather than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Does the passage prohibit observance of the dietary laws? This is a much-debated question. The first sentence does not seem to prohibit them, but the second sentence ends with the reference to "obstructing spiritual elevation." Discuss.

The Pittsburgh Platform goes on to say: "We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason." How does this line compare to, and contrast with, the statement on dietary law? How do both of these passages apply to a contemporary discussion of ethical eating and food practices, including and beyond traditional laws of *kashrut*?

TEXT 2: Excerpts from the Columbus Platform of 1937

Each age has the obligation to adapt the teaching of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism.

Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs...It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.

Jewish life is marked by consecration to these ideals of Judaism. It calls for faithful participation in the life of the Jewish community as it finds expression in home, synagogue and school and in all other agencies that enrich Jewish life and promote its welfare.

The tone of this statement seems to contrast with the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Do you think that those who drafted this Platform wanted to open new pathways of observance for Reform Jews?

No specific reference to the dietary laws is made in this document, but there is discussion of congregational life, social justice and Torah. How could these Platform excerpts, without directly mentioning eating concerns, inform our current decisions about food policy?

**TEXT 3: Excerpt from Commentary on
A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism of 1999**

In a time when more and more people are using diet to express their beliefs, "our peoples' ongoing relationship with God" makes an increasing number of Reform Jews look seriously at aspects of kashrut. The Third Draft of the Principles specifically mentioned kashrut, tallit, tefillin, and mikveh (ritual immersion) to demonstrate the principle that there is no mitzvah barred to Reform Jews, even as the Reform Movement does not compel the observance of any mitzvot. Implied in the word "modern," is a desire to "introduce innovation while preserving tradition" (Preamble). An example of this might be extending dietary restrictions to animals raised under conditions violating tza'ar ba'alei chayim (inflicting pain on living creatures), or refraining from foods which demonstrate the oshek, oppression, of those who work the fields to harvest our foods.

What do you make of the reference to *kashrut* in this paragraph? Why might *kashrut* have been deleted from the final version of the platform? How have attitudes toward *kashrut* and eating changed in your congregation in the last five, ten or 20 years?

The excerpt refers both to "aspects" of *kashrut* and to a desire for blending innovation and tradition in our eating practices. How might your synagogue food policy reflect this idea?

These texts help us to see the evolution in Reform Jewish understanding of the relationship between eating and holiness. The platforms written since 1937 illustrate an increasing openness to a Reform exploration of tradition, and by extension, to traditional dietary laws. Although ethical eating is not specifically mentioned in any of the recent platforms, there is ample evidence that food continues to be a focus of attention of many Reform Jews and Reform institutions.⁵

An additional activity on this topic might be inviting committee members to consider how our dietary decisions have historically served as one primary path to express Jewish values. The list might include:

Covenant ברית

(*brit*) The covenant is a pact that we, the Jewish People, enter into and maintain with God and with one another. Many understand the observance of *mitzvot* (literally "commandments") to be an expression of our commitment to this covenant. For many, observing *kashrut* and maintaining a particular diet fulfills an essential *mitzvah*.

Holiness קדושה

(*kedusha*) The Torah teaches that humans are created in God's image and must thus work toward *kedusha*, holiness, mindful of our essential animal instincts. Making distinctions and sanctifying what and how we eat through traditional kosher laws can be one powerful manifestation of *kedusha*.

Jewish Identity זיהוּת

(*z'hut*) Observing *kashrut* or eating “kosher style” enables us to connect to the Jewish People. As covenant reinforces our spiritual bond with God and other Jews, *z'hut* reinforces our cultural bond with other Jews.

Health בריאות

(*bri'ut*) Ancient and modern Jewish authorities alike have suggested that the details of *kashrut* can be explained by their unique health properties. While we do not treat Torah as a reliable medical treatise, we can continue to honor our Jewish values through healthy eating choices.

Session 4: Congregational Policies: Theirs and Ours

Committee members will come together again to review other congregational food policies and to draft an appropriate policy for your synagogue. This may take more than one session. (Sample policies are found in the appendix to this document.)

Questions as you read policies might include:

- Does this policy address dietary and ethical eating concerns beyond *kashrut*?
- Does the statement offer explanations of how or why decisions were made? Does it provide insight into the process of decision-making for this congregation?
- Does this policy offer illustrative examples?
- Does this policy explicitly address Reform Jewish values or reflect the mission statement of the congregation?

After reviewing other congregational examples, the committee is ready to begin to draft a policy for your synagogue. This process demands time, intentional listening, attention to detail, and good humor. Once you have completed drafting the policy, you will need to develop a system for consideration, ratification, publication, and periodic review. You may want to use existing models for policy-making in your congregation as a starting point for advancing your new food policy. Each of these steps must be made with deliberation and intention. The process of preparing a workable food policy for your congregation can be a source of great satisfaction, for you will conclude with a usable product that will serve your synagogue and your members for years to come.

Session 5: Adoption and Celebration

Once the policy has been proposed, tested, and accepted by the Board or other decision-making body, think about hosting a festive meal to mark the occasion. Consider inviting your entire congregation and community to the meal to ‘experience’ your exciting new policy, and try to highlight foods that illustrate the values embodied by your policy. Such a celebration can be a wonderful way to introduce the congregation to the fruits of your labors and to the new guidelines that will reinforce and strengthen your synagogue community.

*Based on a guide prepared by Rabbi Jeffrey Brown
Temple Solel, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, California⁶*

¹ "Attitudes, Beliefs & Values Shaping Jewish Practice," from *A Guide to Jewish Practice* by Rabbi David Teutsch (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 2003), pp. 15-25.

² Rabbi Arthur Waskow attributes the coining of "eco-kashrut" to Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in *Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995) p. 117.

³ This list draws upon Waskow's work, *ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

⁴ <http://ccarnet.org/documentsandpositions/platforms/>

⁵ The CCAR currently has a Task Force devoted to the subject, and kashrut has been highlighted in two major Reform publications of the last 25 years: *Gates of Mitzvah* by Simeon Maslin (1979) and *Jewish Living* by Mark Washofsky (2001).

⁶ This very abbreviated guide is based on Rabbi Brown's rabbinic thesis, which is available on line:

<http://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0Bw1h34VZx85aZj11MTNjODAtNTU4ZC00ZmVhLWFjMzItMmQ4YjIzZmJhNDMx&hl=en>



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SYNAGOGUE FOOD POLICIES: A URJ GUIDE FOR STUDY AND
DECISION-MAKING

APPENDIX

This guide concludes with five food policies developed by URJ congregations.

- I. Temple Emanu El, Orange Village, Ohio**
- II. Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ (a congregation that is affiliated with both the Reform and Conservative movements)**
- III. Temple B'nai Israel, Oklahoma City, OK (a Reform congregation with a joint religious school with a neighboring Conservative congregation)**
- IV. Temple Adat Elohim, Thousand Oaks, CA**
- V. Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, NC**

I. . Temple Emanu El, Orange Village, OH

Kashrut Policy

Pork and shellfish are prohibited in this facility.

Dairy and meat products will not be served together during the same meal in this facility.

III. Kashrut Guidelines for Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield, NJ

Temple Ner Tamid, affiliated with both the Conservative and Reform movements of American Judaism, requires that all food brought into or prepared in the building be in keeping with our dietary guidelines of *kashrut*. Although there are differing opinions among Jews today as to what entails keeping kosher, we nevertheless believe that the basic categories of prohibition of pork products, shellfish and the mixture of meat and dairy are worthy of our respect and observance. Additionally, we affirm the *mitzvah* (commandment) of ritual slaughter (*sh'chitah*) and therefore require that all meat products be prepared under rabbinical supervision.

Below are the basic guidelines for the preparation and/or consumption of food at Temple Ner Tamid:

- no pork or pork product may be brought into the Temple;
- no meat or meat product may be brought into the Temple without rabbinical supervision (*hashgachah*)—only meat or poultry from a kosher butcher, kosher caterer or a sealed package containing a rabbinical stamp of approval may be brought into the building; Temple Ner Tamid's kitchen is basically set up for the preparation and serving of dairy meals—Rabbi Kushner must be consulted and his prior approval obtained before any meat or meat product is brought into the Temple;
- dairy (milk, cheese, etc.) and meat (beef and chicken) products may not be served at the same meal nor may they be prepared at the same time in the same area;
- no shellfish (e.g., shrimp, lobster, crab, scallop) may be brought into the Temple—only fish having fins and scales are acceptable;
- dairy, egg, pasta, fruit and vegetable products may be brought into the Temple without Rabbinical supervision;
- all beverages are acceptable;
- store-bought bread products (cookies, crackers and baked goods) must use 100% vegetable shortening (no lard or meat by-products);
- home-baked goods must use 100% vegetable shortening (no lard or meat by-products) and be cooked in disposable tins or on aluminum foil;
- because of the complexities of the requirements of *kashrut* during the Passover season, we ask that no food (including beverages) during the 8 days of Passover be brought into the synagogue except by permission of the Rabbi.

**IV. TEMPLE B'NAI ISRAEL, Oklahoma City, OK
FOOD POLICY**

1. For food items to be served at ICSS functions or at Youth activities, the policies of the ICSS Committee and the Youth Committee, respectively, will be followed. (ICSS: Intercongregational Sunday School, a joint program with a neighboring Conservative synagogue).
2. The Temple kitchen is not a kosher kitchen and therefore does not prohibit the mixing of milk and meat dishes.
3. NO TREIF items are to be brought to or cooked in the Temple for either congregational or for personal consumption. (This prohibits pork products, shrimp, crab, or other shell fish, etc.) The ingredients listed in items such as baked beans and hot dogs must be inspected for pork products, and handled according to this rule.
4. No hard liquor may be served in the Temple. Wine, beer, and champagne are exempt from this rule and may be served. (reviewed May 12, 1999 by Ritual & Worship Committee)
5. Questions regarding any of the above should be satisfied before purchasing the item in question.

Reviewed and Passed
Temple Board
February 16, 2000

V. Seeking Holiness Through Sustenance
Adopted by the Temple Adat Elohim Board of Directors
Thousand Oaks, CA, 30 April 2008¹

Introduction:

Temple Adat Elohim is a proud member of the Union for Reform Judaism. As such, we take seriously our commitment to exploring our tradition anew in each generation – continuing the reforms that started in the desert thousands of years ago.²

Temple Adat Elohim is an open and welcoming congregation that honors Jewish communal traditions, values and practices while respecting personal autonomy. This document on Jewish dietary practices (*kashrut*) seeks to provide a structure that will guide our congregation for synagogue functions but does not presume to dictate a home or personal practice for our members.

As is appropriate for a Reform synagogue, this policy is a creation of the congregation and is informed through a careful study of traditional Biblical and Rabbinic texts, *responsa* literature, and our own understandings of the needs of our community. By engaging in this process, we are following the lead of the Reform Movement and responding to our membership’s call for clear and comprehensive guidelines for synagogue practice.

We recognize that this policy will not establish a *kashrut* level that is sufficient for all. However, we believe that this policy honors the values and traditions of Judaism, allowing all who attend our events a level of comfort, and falls respectfully within the continuum of practices of the Reform Movement.

Over the millennia, the reasoning for dietary guidelines in the Jewish community has focused on both health and social consequences. However, a third motive guides us in this policy: The pursuit of *kedusha* (holiness). By observing certain basic dietary practices we affirm our connection with the Jewish people throughout the ages and around the world – a holy community that transcends time and space. By intentionally choosing, preparing and consuming our food we become conscious of all of our actions – a holy self-awareness that strengthens our inner beings. By recognizing the gift of sustenance we acknowledge our blessings – a holy relationship that enhances our lives.

¹ The previous policy was implemented in 1990.

² From the 1999 Platform of the Reform Movement: “We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of *mitzvot* (sacred obligations) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these *mitzvot* have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times.”

It is our hope that this policy will open doors for our community, confirming Temple Adat Elohim as the progressive Jewish center for life-long learning, spiritual growth and connection.

General Guidelines:

The following policy applies to all food prepared at or brought into the Temple campus. This includes but is not limited to food served for events sponsored by the Temple and Temple affiliates, privately catered events and food that is brought to the Temple for personal consumption.

Pork products, shellfish products or other foods prohibited by the Torah are not permitted.

Temple Sponsored events³ & “Pot Lucks”

Meat and dairy products⁴ may not be served at the same meal.

“Pot Lucks” will be defined in publications as “meat” or “dairy”.

Private Events⁵

Meat and dairy products may not be served or mixed in the same dish (i.e., no meat lasagna). Food must be clearly marked as “meat”, “dairy” or “*pareve*/neutral” and may not be served on the same table.

Personal Meals⁶

Meat and dairy may be mixed for personal consumption.

Passover Guidelines (in addition to the above guidelines)

No food or drinks containing the following grains may be brought into the Temple: wheat, rye, oats, barley and spelt .

Matzah or food made with *matzah* products (which are made from one of these five grains) may be brought to the Temple.

Though not considered kosher for Passover by some communities, products made with corn, rice, beans and other legumes may be brought into the Temple.

We encourage:

The use of kosher wine.

Labeling all food as “meat”, “dairy” or “*pareve*” (does not contain meat or dairy products.)

³ “Temple Sponsored events” are defined as any event sponsored by Temple Adat Elohim or TAE affiliates. This includes but is not limited to Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Mishpacha, Greatest Generation, and Youth Groups.

⁴ Meat is defined as beef, lamb, chicken, turkey, and duck. Dairy is defined as any milk product including butter, cheese, sour cream, and cream cheese. Fish, eggs, mayonnaise, and soy products are not considered a dairy or meat product but rather “*pareve*/neutral” and therefore can be mixed with dairy or meat.

⁵ “Private Events” are defined as events arranged through the Temple caterer.

⁶ “Personal Meals” are defined as food brought to the Temple for personal consumption by students, staff and guests.

Reciting appropriate blessings before and after meals.
Auxiliaries and affiliates to follow this policy off site.

This policy does not require the following:

A Kosher certification or Kosher meat

A Kosher supervisor

Separate meat and dairy dishes and serving items.

For further clarification of our policy, please speak with one of our Clergy.

Implementation of this policy:

All current contracts with the caterer (as of 30 April 2008) will be honored under the 1990 policy.

All other guidelines will be effective 6 months after the Board votes for approval. (1 November 2008).

The final policy will be printed in the Temple Directory, Bar/Bat Mitzvah handbook and other publications.

An educational component on kashrut will be integrated into child and adult education programs.



Appendix to Building Use Policies: Dietary Restrictions at Judea Reform Congregation

Food brought into Judea Reform Congregation's (JRC's) buildings should adhere to the congregation's dietary policies. Though JRC does not keep a kosher kitchen, there are certain restrictions that members, caterers, and renters should be aware of and must adhere to.

- 1. Pork products are prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:*
 - i. Ham*
 - ii. Pork chops*
 - iii. Pepperoni*
 - iv. Bacon and bacon bits*
 - v. Prosciutto*
 - vi. Pancetta*
 - vii. Sausage*

- 2. Shellfish are prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:*
 - i. Scallops*
 - ii. Shrimp*
 - iii. Lobster*
 - iv. Clams*
 - v. Mussels*

- 3. Meat and milk should not be served in the same dish. They may, however, be served at the same meal, so individuals may choose to pair them. Example: Meat lasagna with cheese is not appropriate; vegetarian lasagna with meatballs on the side is appropriate.*

- 4. During the week before Passover and the eight days of Passover, leavened products are not to be brought on the premises, to allow for proper cleaning of the buildings in preparation of Passover. This includes, but is not limited to:*
 - i. Bread & bread products*
 - ii. Pasta & pasta products*
 - iii. Wheat noodles*
 - iv. Crackers*
 - v. Legumes*
 - vi. Rice*
 - vii. Soy and soy products*
 - viii. Beer*