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## Editor's Note



**May 21 , 2007**

Mars quickly reversed itself over the weekend and withdrew animal-based ingredients from its products, we've got the late breaking news...The Forward continues to go after Agriprocessors, a major supplier of kosher meat in the country and we take a closer look. Is it the paper's quest for seeking the high moral ground for kosher or is it part of the Orthodox bashing that it has occasionally been accused of?...Sara Cohen looks at the developing holiday vacation business other than Passover...Israelis are beginning to speak of major losses in light of the shrinking dollar. Our Bureau Chief Idele Ross has the story...There have been several restaurant closings in New York, but according to experts, far below the norm in the restaurant business...Rabbis are warning Israelis to be vigilant on kashrus after the country suffers its own version of the Monsey Scandal...Columbus, Ohio is the latest community struggling to keep its primary kosher store in business...Ohio is also the latest state where a major chain is moving in the kosher direction...Israelis are eating a record amount of dairy foods on the eve of Shavuot...From Here and There has the story of a kosher sandwich that costs \$120 and a vicious anti-Semitic incident at a kosher marketing in Lviv, Ukraine...In Duly Noted, we apologize for an error in a dateline last week...Eda Kram's New Product Showcase covers new gourmet fruit spreads.

A Happy Shavuot.

*Please Note:* Next weeks' edition will be published on Tuesday May 29th, due to the observance of Memorial Day.

**Menachem Lubinsky**

Editor, KosherToday

President, LUBICOM Marketing Consulting

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## Breaking News

### Mars Relents and Removes Animal Based Ingredients

**London...** Israel's Chief Rabbinate was about to ban such products as Mars Bars, Snickers, Twix, Milky Way, Maltesers and Minstrels when the company hastily admitted that it had made a mistake and agreed to remove all animal based ingredients. The Chief Rabbinate did not accept the ruling of the London Beth Din that the amount used was miniscule and therefore, while not vegetarian, was still kosher. Kashrut director Rabbi Jeremy Conway had explained that "[Masterfoods](#) (manufacturers of the chocolate products) have announced that their products can no longer be considered suitable for vegetarians as the whey powder may be manufactured using animal rennet. The likelihood of whey used in chocolate coming from rennet-based cheese is quite small." But now the company has assured that the products will continue to be kosher. "We made a mistake. We apologise," the company said in a statement on its website. "The consumer is our boss. Therefore we listen to you and your feedback. Therefore we commit to you today, that we at Mars UK will ensure that a selection of your favorite brands: Mars bars, Snickers bars, Galaxy and Maltesers, will be suitable for vegetarians in the near future. To this effect we are starting to change our manufacturing process today." A spokesman for the Orthodox Union(OU) said that the developments in Europe never had any effect on the Mars products in the US which it certifies.

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## Kosher Food Industry

### Special Report: A Jewish Newspaper's Crusade Against a Kosher Meat Purveyor

**New York...** [The Forward](#), the English language weekly successor to the Yiddish daily founded in 1897, continued its crusade against [Agriprocessors](#) in its May 18th edition. Like some of its previous investigatory stories on the Iowa kosher meat processing plant, the story on alleged new abuses of the labor force at Agri was written by Nathaniel Popper and like previous stories it again profiles the efforts by some Conservative rabbis to create a "heksher tzedek" or a certification that would also cover social justice. According to the Forward, the Conservative movement has resolved to move forward with this certification, thus far non-existent in the marketplace. Agri sales in markets with large numbers of Conservative Jews have risen dramatically, according to some retailers reached by *KosherToday*.

The Forward is the only Jewish newspaper that has taken on the kosher meat producer, which is a major supplier of kosher meat in the nation's retail establishments. Like the Conservatives, the weekly does not attack the kashrus of the products produced at the plant. Agri is certified kosher by a number of kashrus agencies including the [Orthodox Union](#)(OU). Its focus originally was on the inhumane treatment of the animals (in the aftermath of alleged abuses

shown on a video by PETA), but has since progressed to the treatment of workers. The kashrus agencies and other groups have pointed out that the plant is heavily regulated and monitored by government agencies, but the Forward seems to say that this oversight is not enough. The anti-Agri crusade also ignores the fact that Agri is part of a larger meat industry where conditions are considerably worse than at the kosher plants.

The Forward website quotes one reader Eric Leibman, who presents the broader picture this way: "The reality is that the mass production of meat for mass consumption is a very grim and unhappy business indeed. Its working conditions are always far from pleasant and improve only marginally at best. The central fact of the situation is this: Meat production in America depends largely on illegal aliens who are badly treated in operations much like the author describes in plants all across the country. If you clean up the plants, you drive up the price...big time...And by the way, even if the accusations against Agriprocessors are true, another sad reality is this: The people who put the meat on your table nationwide are most likely far more brutally and inhumanely treated at numerous other plants across the country than they are at Agriprocessors. Don't think you've found a unique situation here, if, indeed, the facts as alleged in the article turn out to be true."

Mr. Liebman's points are illustrated in a few examples that only further reinforce the vendetta against Agri. For example, the Forward headline is "Kosher Slaughterhouse Hit With Lawsuits" (by a group of Agri employees). But nowhere in the article does Mr. Popper mention that similar lawsuits are routinely filed against other meat packing plants, including giant Tyson Foods in February by employees at plants in Denison and Storm Lake. The Forward quotes lead counsel on the lawsuit in Iowa, Brian McCafferty, as saying that "workers at AgriProcessors are not being paid for anything other than the time that the production lines are moving. But local Iowa papers reporting the story noted "Agriprocessors follows a policy used widely in the meat packing industry known as "gang time" or "line time," and employees are paid only for hours spent on the production line.

Sources told *KosherToday* that much of the labor problems at Agri stem from its ongoing battle with the [United Food and Commercial Workers](#), who have been trying to organize plant workers for about eight months. Indeed, sources say that much of the news of the labor discontent appears to come from Union officials. Mr. Popper credits the Forward for stirring up the trouble, as he noted: "Working conditions at the AgriProcessors slaughterhouse have been under scrutiny in the past year, after an article in the Forward detailed worker complaints. Since then, the company has been the subject of an investigation by rabbis affiliated with the Conservative synagogue movement. During these inquiries workers at the plant were generally hesitant to speak publicly about their concerns, but this appears to be changing." The Forward story was subsequently the subject of several other newspapers, including a New York Times religion column on Saturday May 19th (which also quoted *KosherToday's* previous reportage of events).

The Forward has a long history of championing causes for immigrants and laborers. Many Jewish immigrants labeled the daily as a "leftist paper" and preferred such competing Yiddish dailies as Der Tag and the Morning Journal, which later merged. Their views of the Forward were reinforced by its flamboyant founding editor Abraham Cahan who routinely advised immigrants in the early 1900's in his "A Bintele Brief" column to reject the mores of the shtetl in favor of the "new world," which frequently meant shirking their religion, leaving family behind in Eastern Europe and working on the Shabbat. The Forward itself says: "The Forward family of newspapers continues to carry on the founding vision of Abraham Cahan, serving together as the voice of the American Jew and the conscience of the community." Ironically, this week the Forward announced that it would renew Cahan's "A Bintele Brief" column, this time by renowned sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer.

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## Shavuot Latest Holiday to Offer Retreats Around the World

**Kerhonkson, NY... by Sara Cohen...** Many Passover vacationers have barely unpacked their bags and they're off again, this time for the Shavuot holiday, which begins on Tuesday evening May 22nd and continues through Thursday the 24th. While program retreats for the Pesach holiday have become a highly profitable business, entrepreneurs are now offering programs during some of the other holidays on the Jewish calendar, including Rosh Hashanah, Succoth and Shavuot. This year, people looking to spend the holiday in an educational, friendly and warm setting, had many options to choose from. [Gateways](#), a popular outreach organization that runs year round retreats, is coordinating a retreat in Kerhonkson, NY. "While our programs have typically been targeted towards unaffiliated Jews, our Shavuot program attracts a larger crowd of Orthodox Jews," said Rabbi Avrumi Jordin, Director of Operations at Gateways. He explained that the retreat program is a unique opportunity to truly appreciate the meaning of the holiday and satisfy people's desire to be immersed in a Torah filled environment. On the first night of Shavuot, where people traditionally learn Torah all night, classes will be given throughout the night.

Like Passover, the options for Shavuot vacationers are not limited to the borders of the US. [KosherHoliday.net](#) will help you find the perfect spot for comfortable hotel retreats for Shavuot or any other holiday in Israel, Italy and Switzerland. Another similar option offered by [TotallyJewishTravel.com](#) offers kosher traveling to many destinations around the world. Promoters say that while the other holidays are still far from reaching what Passover represents to the industry, "they are slowly but surely catching up." *KosherToday* has learned that several Passover promoters are looking to expand their programs to Succoth. Of course, there are always the classical programs in the Catskills where every holiday is a vacation holiday.

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## Kosher Restaurants Fare Better than Non-Kosher Restaurants

**New York...** A young couple parked their car in front of the Zion Restaurant on 18th Avenue only to discover that their favorite restaurant had closed for good. Said the man: "You just can't keep up with these closures." Despite some recent closures, sources say, new kosher restaurants survive longer than similar non-kosher startups where the majority do not survive the two-year threshold of success. According to kosher restaurant maven Elan Kornblum, the publisher & president of the [Great Kosher Restaurants Magazine](#), many of the recent closures were not surprises since "they were struggling for a long time." Amongst recent closures in Manhattan was Eden Wok on West 72nd Street which closed because of an expensive lease (still has East 34th Street location) and Domani. In Brooklyn, the list included Al Dente, Zion, Circa – Ave. J, Blue Palace Bissaleh, Bonjour Grill/ Hod V'Hadar, and Lou's. Said Kornblum: "When you have five restaurants within one block of each other (like Coney Island and Avenue J in Brooklyn), it's survival of the fittest and some, undoubtedly, will not make it. But competition is good, it makes the restaurant better, keeps them on their toes, prevents prices from being inflated and if you work hard, you'll make it."

In general, says Kornblum, kosher restaurants in the U.S. seem to be doing well. Mike Gershkovich from Mike's Bistro agrees, noting that he's had "a fantastic last 6 months." Other restaurateurs reached by *KosherToday* also agreed that business has been extraordinary. Kornblum also listed a number of new kosher restaurants that have either recently opened or are planning to open soon. They include: Benny's, K.S. Steakhouse, Kosher Bistro Grill, Palace Grill & Deli, Jerusalem Palace and T Fusion Steakhouse in Brooklyn, Different Twist Café in Queens and Olympic Pita in Manhattan. Other new eateries have opened in Teaneck, Florida and on the West Coast too.

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## A Kosher Store Wants to Sell and Keep it Kosher

**Columbus, Ohio...** It is a story that has repeated itself in many cities throughout

the country. A local kosher retailer who has served the community for many years struggles to survive in the face of competition from the new boy on the block, a big boy, the local supermarket. According to the [Columbus Dispatch](#), Irv Szames, who has owned the Bexley Kosher Market, is looking for a buyer that is committed to keeping the store kosher. As Central Ohio's only completely kosher food market and deli, the store has many loyal customers, some of whom drive long distances to the store. Szames said that health problems caused by a stroke in 2005 won't allow him to continue to run the store. The Kroeger's supermarket carries many kosher products but not nearly as many as Bexley carried. While some packaged meats are available, none have a butcher like Bexley. While Szames looks for a suitor, many in the community are convinced that in the end their favorite kosher store may succumb to the larger stores just as many similar stores have done in other cities.

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### **Remodeled Milford Supermarket to Offer Large Selection of Kosher**

**Milford, Ohio...** Located just 16 miles from Cincinnati, a Bigg's supermarket will soon offer kosher consumers a broad selection of kosher foods. The store in Pleasant Ridge will soon begin remodeling its store at Highland and Ridge avenues to offer customers more variety, unique products and expanded departments – with a special focus on kosher foods. The store will remain open during remodeling. Although other Bigg's stores have recently been remodeled, this is the first remodeled Bigg's location to have a focus on kosher products. "Bigg's intends to take the kosher shopping experience to a new level with the renovation of our Highland and Ridge store," said Bigg's president Steve Kaczynski. "Our goal is to offer the highest quality and best selection of products to the Jewish community, all at the True Minimum Price." The Pleasant Ridge Bigg's will offer fresh kosher meats and deli, as well as a plethora of kosher products in the frozen, dairy, grocery and liquor departments, with a special emphasis on products from Israel. Bigg's also is preparing to partner with local independent kosher suppliers to further support businesses in the local community. Bigg's, a locally managed [Supervalu](#) company, will utilize the expertise of Supervalu's Albertsons and Jewel-Osco divisions whom operate 15 kosher-format stores across the United States. From Seattle to Philadelphia, these one-stop kosher destination stores feature a full range of services - from kosher delis with the freshest and finest selections, to full service kosher butcher shops with a complete range of fresh poultry and beef, cut right on premise. Fresh kosher fish, sushi and Parve baked goods round out these kosher shops. All of these formats are under strict rabbinical supervision with a staff of trained Mashgichim. Bigg's goal will be to mimic this format in their new store, according to Yakov M. Yarmove, Corporate Category Manager Ethnic Marketing and Specialty Foods, SuperValu.

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## **News From Israel**

### **Sinking Dollar Worries Exporters in Israel**

**Tel Aviv... by Idele Ross, KosherToday Bureau Chief...** Manufacturers Association President Shraga Brosh has called on the government to "help manufacturers before a disaster happens". Brosh was speaking at an emergency meeting on the exchange rate crisis. Some 150 exporters and industrialists attended the meeting in the wake of the fall of the dollar to a nine-year low. Brosh said that if the shekel continues to strengthen, it could mean a loss of \$2.4 billion dollars in revenue by the end of the year and a loss of 35,000 jobs. In fact some factories are already threatening to shut down and reopen abroad. Manufacturers are calling on the Bank of Israel to reduce interest rates by one percent. They are also calling on the government to renew its fund for small businesses to serve as a safety net for the smaller exporters. Dan Proper,

CEO of Osem Foods said that their business is not as affected as most by the weak dollar as most of their exports are to Europe.

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### **Rabbis in Israel Urge Public Kashrus Vigilance**

**Bnei Brak...** Large posters in this predominantly Orthodox city urged citizens to "be careful on what they eat." The warnings followed Israel's version of the Monsey scandal. A Petach Tikvah meat factory, which was packaging meat under the label "Manhattan", was caught with treife (non-kosher) meat on the premises. The Chief Rabbinate urged people who used this meat to kosher their dishes, pots and flatware. The discovery was not made by the Rabbinate, but by the Department of Agriculture. The factory was under the kosher supervision of the Rabbinate of Petach Tikvah. Observers noted that the impact was not quite as severe as the Monsey case since the Manhattan brand was largely consumed by secular Jews, but customers were appalled at the idea that they were being fed non-kosher meat.

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### **Dairy Consumption Reaches Five Year High in Israel**

**Jerusalem...** The Shavuot Festival marked on Wednesday (May 23rd, only one day in Israel) celebrates the wheat harvest and dairy foods that are traditionally served. Ahead of the holiday, the [Dairy Board and Agriculture Ministry](#) surveyed dairy consumption among Israelis. The survey found that Israelis drank an average of 175 liters or 875 glasses of milk during 2006. This reflects a 6.5% increase. The data also showed that sales of fruit yogurts were also stronger. The figures reflect a reversal in Israeli eating habits as dairy consumption had fallen off over the past five years. Israeli dairy consumption still ranks very low, especially compared to Western Europe and Scandinavia where consumption is 350 liters a year. In the US it's 250 liters a year. Israel's habits are similar to Argentina's.

Ronen Zohar, CEO of [Strauss Dairies](#), said that Strauss sees a 50% increase in the purchase of cheese products during the month and most of the sales take place in the week leading up to the holiday. Strauss produced a number of specialty cheese products especially for the holiday as well as a do it yourself kit for making cheesecake. A Strauss Dairies survey found that 81% of the Israeli Jewish consumers serve cheesecake for Shavuot, 50% prepare quiche, and 22% make blintzes.

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## **From Here and There, Kosher News**

**London...** At £60.50 (almost \$120), is this the world's most expensive kosher sandwich? According to the London Jewish Chronicle, the Six13 kosher (not glatt) restaurant is promoting a jumbo sandwich for delivery at a record price.

**Lviv, Ukraine...** Members of a far-right party disrupted a public event by a company marketing kosher ice cream, according to a report by Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. The head of the regional branch of the "Freedom" Party--headed by a group of party youth activists in the storming of the building. Screaming "Ukraine won't be sold to kikes!" and "Down with the kike-communist government of Yanukovych-Kuchma!" the youths smashed display stands of the ice cream and got into a brawl with the company's security guards. Police arrived 5-10 minutes later and detained some of the attackers, who were released three hours later after paying fines. No injuries were reported.

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## New Product Showcase

### New Fruit Spreads from Ameressen Gourmet

By Eda Kram... [Ameressen Foods](#) will debut its highly anticipated line of Gourmet Fruit Spreads in various up-scale West Coast markets this month. The 9-year old company, whose four fruit spread flavors, Cherry/Vanilla, Peach /Almond, Raspberry/Cinnamon, and Strawberry/Pineapple embody the elegant style of Old World Europe and were created by Jurgen Sauer, a Bavarian Pastry Chef, who used his grandmother's recipes and by his business partner Vincent DeMarco, who envisioned bringing those recipes here after he traveled throughout Europe. The four flavors packaged in 9 oz. Jars were developed with the idea that not only should they be elegant to serve, but also healthy, containing only the freshest fruits, pure cane sugar, fruit pectin and no preservatives. The line is KSA certified kosher. [Tzali's Foods](#), Los Angeles is the distributor for the products and can be contacted at (323) 276-8070.



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## Duly Noted

Our story on the Pita on the Grill restaurant mistakenly was datelined Teaneck. It should have been Cleveland. Yes, cheesecake is served there (an answer to one inquiry), but it is the pareve or imitation cheesecake served nowadays in many meat restaurants. We regret the error.

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