

What's The Real Deal With Strawberries? *Take Your Pick*

The last issue of KASHRUS went to print right after the strawberry concern erupted. We tried to briefly cover the positions of some of the major players.

This summer saw a lot of scrambling around with *kashrus* agencies attempting to work on methods to provide strawberries while sticking to accepted guidelines for checking. Some “threw in the towel” and do not use any strawberries. Others avoid the issue by allowing their certifications to use strawberries whose outer skin has been shaved off, bypassing the entire problem. Some are using strawberries that *mashgichim* have vigorously cleaned and checked. Others use certain brands of frozen strawberries. The one universal feeling is that things have changed from what they once were, whether temporarily or permanently. Only time will tell.

KASHRUS engaged in some checking and our unofficial report is that every single strawberry which we examined had at least one live white thrip on it. Whether these can be removed sufficiently through washing is the matter at hand.

The reader is advised to peruse the following digest of opinions and discuss the matter with a Rav.

The “OU” Method

The following is the recommended method that the “OU” has developed for preparing straw-

berries as excerpted from the soon-to-be published “OU Guide to Checking Fruits, Vegetables, and Berries” (2nd edition):

1. Remove the green leaves from the top of the strawberries, careful to not make a hole in the top of the strawberry. If a hole was made, the strawberry should then be cut in half, allowing you to wash both the inside and outside of the strawberry.
2. Place the strawberries in water that is concentrated with liquid soap.
3. Vigorously agitate the strawberries in water.
4. Allow the strawberries to soak in water for several minutes after agitation.
5. Wash each strawberry individually under a strong stream of running water, ensuring that the entire surface of the strawberry is thoroughly washed.
6. Dry strawberries, wiping their surface.

Cautionary note: This procedure must be performed meticulously to achieve desired results. A visual inspection should be made following the process.

Consumers wishing to receive additional direction from the “OU” how to prepare fresh strawberries according to “OU” standards should contact them at 212-613-8241.



The "cRc" Method

The following information on strawberries is from the Chicago Rabbinical Council (July 24, 2007):

As of Rosh Chodesh Av, the "cRc" policy in regard to strawberries is the following. This policy of cleaning strawberries is for strawberries purchased in the Midwest region only.

1. Tops must be removed
2. The strawberries must be washed under a strong stream of water, while rubbing all sides of the strawberry during this process.

The "Star-K" Method

The following is the "Star-K" recommended method for preparing strawberries:

1. Strawberries should be topped, washed with water and detergent
2. Rinse well.
3. Inspect strawberry: Check for insects and/or evidence of infestation

You can see a video of bug in strawberry at www.star-k.org/cons-appr-vegetables-videos10.htm. [Editor's note: The video demonstrates the "Star-K" cleaning method but does not mention step three, examination of the strawberries.]

The Position of Rabbi Moshe Vaye

In May, Rabbi Moshe Vaye, the leading expert on insects in Israel, and author of a three-volume set on vegetable, fruit, grain and fish inspection (*Bedikas Hamazon Cahaloch*), discovered a serious problem with his formerly recommended method of cleaning strawberries.

He found that even if no insects were visible in the wash-water from the first several washings, insects might appear in a third or fourth wash! He vigorously examined strawberries from California to establish the facts about U.S. strawberries. The frightening results of his study in June and his consequent new requirements are spelled out on page 37. This is causing a stir of controversy in this country.

In the Hebrew version of the letter he relates

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that he examined the four leading brands of strawberries: **Driscoll's, Orchard, Berry Bowl and Naturipe Farms**. In all of them he found thrips remaining after executing the methods which he had formerly recommended — the very same methods U.S. *kashrus* agencies still recommend.

Are Frozen Strawberries Different?

Frozen strawberries are, by their very nature, different. Firstly, the *kashrus* agencies attempt to certify only those companies whose washing methods produce results. We are not dealing with recommended procedures executed by a *mashgiach* or by a housewife. We are talking about what has already been done by a machine to clean the berries.

Some *kashrus* agencies say that their examinations have proven that the company's method works. Interestingly, however, a number of *kashrus* agencies have pulled back their certification of frozen strawberries, even those bearing their symbol. [One company is refusing to sell the 250,000 pounds of strawberries which they produced under kosher certification due to an increased number of thrips spotted after this issue surfaced.]

Another *kashrus* agency issued an alert stating that the frozen strawberries bearing their certification should not be used because of insect infestation; however they permitted using foods that are cooked or baked and have those frozen strawberries in them.

A good question to ask those agencies who accept the company's washing method is how much product has been examined by the *mashgichim*. Have they increased their sampling as a result of the recent findings? Do they continue to use increased inspections or have they now returned to the old sampling of about one package per thousand?

See our article entitled "7 Problems With Broccoli", *KASHRUS* #133, March 2007, pp. 36-39, where it was explained that, when there is a significant degree of infestation, the burden of proof is on the processor to remove the *halachic* cloud and to prove that his product is bug-free. He must be certain that his methods remove all doubt of a significant amount of insects remaining.

Rabbi Moshe Vaye's Findings On California Strawberries

RABBI MOSHE VAIE
ADVICE AND GUIDANCE ON KASHRUS
AND INFESTED FOOD
138 SANHEDRIA HAMURCHEVET

הרב משה ויא
יעוץ והדרכה בנושאי כשרות
ונגיעות במזון
סנהדריה המורחבת 138 ירושלים

Jerusalem, June 07

Checking of California Strawberries

4 small containers of first quality California strawberries were checked in our laboratory: Driscoll's, Orchard, Berry Bowl and Naturipe Farms.

Results: all samples were found to be infested with small thrips.

Methods of checking: 2 different methods were used:

1. The strawberries were soaked in soap water and vigorously stirred. Then each strawberry was rinsed thoroughly under a strong stream of running water. **Results:** a few thrips were still present on the strawberries.
2. Other active agents were added to the soap water, which were intended to kill the thrips and cause them to loose their grip on the fruits, and fall off when rinsed. **Results:** a few thrips were still found on the strawberries.

Conclusion: the method of cleaning strawberries described in our sefer "*Bedikas Hamazon Cahalocho*" is at present not reliable for American strawberries. Efforts are being made to find an effective and adequate method of cleaning. Meanwhile, it is advised to use the strawberries only in one of the following ways (approved by leading *poskim**):

1. Peel the strawberries, then wash them under running water.
2. Cut off the green leaf together with a thin layer of fruit. Cut off any deep crack or hole. Soak strawberries in soap water for 3 minute, stir and rinse every single strawberry under a strong stream of running water, while rubbing it with your fingers.

Repeat the whole procedure (soaking, rinsing, and rubbing each fruit) three times. You may then use these strawberries either completely grinded, cooked or baked.

*הגר"ש וואזנר שליט"א, הגר"נ קרליץ שליט"א והגאון ר' טוביה וייס שליט"א.