

Doc 017

STAR-K Guidance for Purchasing Fresh Fish

June 24, 2022

STAR-K receives many questions about purchasing fresh fish from non-kosher stores or sources. We hope this brief article will help clarify some of the confusion regarding this topic.

The Halacha is that in order for fish to be kosher, it needs to have fins and scales¹. Furthermore, there is a rabbinic prohibition² to consume fish that has had the skin/scales³ removed (e.g., a skinless fish fillet) without having seen that that it was a kosher fish.

Stores with Kosher Supervision

In stores or companies that are under kosher supervision, the fish are filleted with a mashgiach present and therefore do not present any issue.

Skinless Fillet from a Non-Kosher Store or Source

Purchasing skinless fish either from a store that does not have kosher supervision, or that was not sealed in a package bearing a reliable kosher symbol, is not permissible.

Buying Fish with Skin Still Attached

One may purchase cut-up fish provided that (a) the skin is still intact and (b) the entire surface of the fish which was cut is scraped with a knife and then rinsed well to allay any concern of non-kosher fish residue.⁴

Buying a Whole Fish

Technically, one may go to a non-kosher fish store, ask for a whole fish with skin/scales intact, ensure that the knives and cutting boards are fully clean,⁵ and have them butcher the fish for you while you observe. This could negate the need to scrape and rinse each piece. However, this is not always feasible, particularly if the store is busy or the cutting area is not visible. Furthermore, the equipment really does need to be checked to be completely clean, which may not be so feasible either. STAR-K does not recommend consumers purchase fish from a non-kosher store in this manner unless there is really no other option. A Rav should be consulted to determine if your situation warrants allowing this. Alternatively, one may buy a whole fish and cut it at home, which would avoid the above issues.

Packaged Fish with Hashgacha

Finally, there are non-kosher stores that sell packaged fish fillets with a kosher symbol. Packaged fish of this type are processed by a commercial fish producer and are not handled in the store. Consumers may purchase any pre-packaged fish without any further action needed so long as the packaged is sealed and it bears the symbol of a reliable agency that has a mashgiach at the manufacturer who checks for scales. STAR-K does not consider the color of salmon to a definitive sign/*siman* of kashrus.

The STAR-K Kashrus Hotline (410-484-4110) is available to answer any questions consumers may have. We are open Monday through Thursday 9-5 and Friday 9-2. We can also be reach by email at info@star-k.org.

¹ *Vayikra 11:12*

² See *Avoda Zara 39a* and *TShu"a 118:1*.

³ When the skin is attached, even if the fish has already been descaled, the outline of the scales is usually visible. That is enough to confirm the fish as being kosher.

⁴ Consumers should not negate the possibility and concern of cross-contamination from non-kosher fish on shared equipment, as our mashgichim who work in the fish industry, report this to be a real concern.

⁵ See fn 4 above