

High standards

Rabbi Heber from the USA monitors kosher production at BASF plants.

By Birgit Hellmann



Rabbi Dovid Heber (left) in dialogue with Dr. Markus Klumpe (EVF/PT, polyether plant) and Dr. Matthias Zipplies (EVF/PT).

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“Cooking kosher used to be a simple thing in the past: There was a butcher and a baker where you got your meat and bread, and you could easily know how they produced it”, explains Rabbi Dovid Heber. “Today it’s much more complicated due to the industrialization of the food supply.” This is why the rabbi travelled all the way from Baltimore, Maryland to Germany and Denmark: A kashrut administrator from the Baltimore-based certification agency “Star-K”, he inspects the BASF plants where nutrition ingredients such as vitamins, carotenoids, coenzymes as well as flavour chemicals and polymers with an array of applications are produced. Star-K has been in charge of kosher inspections at BASF since 2005 and the inspections have a history of more than 12 years.

Worldwide seal of quality

Ingredients for dietary supplements, beverages and food are sold on markets worldwide, and the kosher certificate is a well-known and respected symbol for millions of Jews around the world. “The biblical and rabbinical laws are universally the same”, says Rabbi Heber, “although some additional customs may differ between communities.” According to the rules of the Torah, Jews distinguish between milchig (dairy), fleishig (meat) and pareve (neutral) types of food. Dairy and meat must not be combined in a meal, pareve(neutral) may be combined with either of them. In order to be kosher, meat must come from kosher animals that are slaughtered according to Jewish law. Dairy as well as pareve food must be free of animal substances, including insects. Therefore, pareve and dairy foods that are kosher-certified are also chosen by vegetarians because the kosher label guarantees that it is meat-free. Lactose-intolerant individuals look for the kosher label on meat and pareve to ensure products are free of dairy derivatives. “For those groups as well as all other customers, the kosher label also stands for fully monitored production that meets high sanitary standards”, says Dr. Erik Lüddecke (MEO/VC), manager of the Carotenoid Formulation Plant in Ludwigshafen. Another consequence of the separation of dairy and meat is that many Jews use different sets of kitchen equipment for each kind of food. “Because detergents come in contact with equipment used in food processing, some Jews are stricter and even like their detergents to be kosher certified”, says Rabbi Heber. Consequently, some EV plants are also on his list. These visits are coordinated by Quality Manager Naria Keene von Koenig (EVD/Q). Among the certified products are surfactants and chelating agents for detergents. Plant managers Dr. Klaus Mundinger (EVT/TL), Dr. Friedrich Wirsing (EVF/BT) and Dr. Matthias Zipplies (EVF/TP) show the list of kosher

raw materials, products and production schemes to the rabbi. After a short discussion, each plant manager guides him through the respective plant. The rabbi follows their explanations attentively, asks for details and gives his approval at the end of the inspection.

Special cleaning process

Special cleaning, known as “koshORIZATION” is required when kosher production follows non-kosher production, e.g. in the Carotenoid Formulation Plant where colorants are produced. After producing the water-soluble, lactose-containing Lucantin Pink for animal nutrition, the production line must be kosherized for the next Lucarotin production for human nutrition. Three times a year, piping and vessels are washed with steam at 100 degrees centigrade to remove all traces of non-kosher production before a new kosher production can start. This was also done at the BASF Health & Nutrition (BHN) plant in Denmark where the rabbi went after visiting Ludwigshafen. “We produce 57 different products here at BHN. Twenty-seven of them are kosher. The rest contain gelatine from pigs which are unkosher by definition”, says Lene Riising Bentsen, Quality Manager at BHN. Rabbi Heber watched one of the multipurpose production lines being kosherized. “In the first step of kosherization, they filled the tank with water and heated it above 82 degrees centigrade”, describes Bentsen. “Then they flushed the spray tower with water.” The rabbi surveyed the temperature curve and the whole procedure.

Some 320 products are certified

“I learned a lot about Jewish law, for example that there are even different levels of kosher”, says Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wekel (ME/NR) who is the Kosher Coordinator for ME. “A ‘kosher for Passover’ product has to meet even higher standards for the choice of raw materials and production processes than regular kosher products. We get about 320 ingredients and formulations for human nutrition certified”, he says. In order to grant the kosher label, the rabbi monitors the list of ingredients. “Some ingredients such as oils and glycerine are more delicate than others because they can be non-kosher”, says Rabbi Heber who once visited over 20 BASF plants in two days. To keep an overview, he has compiled comprehensive lists of products and their ingredients which are stored in a database at Star-K’s headquarters in Baltimore. Trained not only as a rabbi but also as an IT expert, he is responsible for data maintenance at Star-K. At the same time, he certifies not only BASF products in Ludwigshafen and Denmark, but also resins from the BASF Corporation based in Florham Park, New Jersey. BASF is the only company for which he leaves North America, seizing the opportunity to visit synagogues in Frankfurt, Strasbourg and Denmark. How does he make sure he eats kosher during his trip? “My wife prepares delicious meals for me before I leave and wraps them up for the trip!”, Rabbi Heber answers.

Kosher certification is often an important key to the market for food products.

