

KOSHER FOOD IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL CHANGES IN DIETARY PATTERNS

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Abstract: *In the context of the rapidly growing global population and increasing awareness of healthy and sustainable nutrition, the need to modify the market, adjust production standards, and innovate dietary practices has become a priority for food producers. This paper focuses on the kosher market, which is rapidly expanding its extensive consumer base, and the procedures that interested food producers must fulfill when implementing kosher standards. The aim of the paper is to provide*

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insight into the potential of kosher standards as a strategy for market dissemination and enhancing the competitiveness of food producers in the Republic of Serbia. A descriptive analysis was used to highlight the narrative surrounding the challenges of global dietary change, including plant-based and cultured meat. It is evident that kosher certification can be a sustainable strategy for overcoming current challenges in dietary practices as we know them today, emphasizing its relevance not only for consumers of Jewish origin but also for the global market, where quality and transparency prevail.

Keywords: *healthy and sustainable nutrition, kosher market, kosher standard, kosher certification, Republic of Serbia, plant-based meat, cultured meat, global market.*

INTRODUCTION

When preparing a meal, in any corner of the universe, kosher food can be obtained if all standards regarding food management are met. However, historically and traditionally, kosher food is associated with Jews, who have a specific way of handling ingredients, processing them, preparing dishes, and consuming them (Hamerman, Schneider, and Rozensher, 2019). The number of Jews in the world reaches 16.78 million, with 15 million of them living equally in the United States (USA) and the homeland state of Israel (Jewish Virtual Library, 2024), and whose followers belong to the second oldest world religion – Judaism (Statista, 2024). Their number increases year by year, as the policy of the homeland state is to gather all Jews from different parts of the world there (Heb. Aliyah). The following countries, completing the top ten with a significant Jewish community, are: France, Canada, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Russia, Germany, Australia, and Brazil (Jewish Virtual Library, 2024).

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many people. Dietary rules in Judaism are based on the Torah (the five books of the prophets of Moses), from which strict regulations (Heb. Kashrut) have emerged, outlining how food must be prepared to be considered permissible for consumption by members of the Jewish religious community (Hamerman, Schneider, and Rozensher, 2019).

The rules of Kashrut classify certain types of food as kosher (fit or suitable for use), meaning they do not contain ingredients that are unacceptable

for consumption. The opposite of kosher is treif (Heb. Trefah), which means that the food is not kosher, and according to the Bible, this refers to an infected animal or one that was not slaughtered in the prescribed manner (Regenstein and Regenstein, 2014). Thus, eating kosher food is considered a way of spiritual elevation and is part of Jewish religious obligations. The interpretation of traditional Jewish law and customs is guided by legal decisions made by religious authorities – rabbis. Despite a full adherence to the rules, there are sometimes differing opinions about the level of kashrut (Blech, 2008). Kosher does not prescribe how livestock should be raised or how much meat should be eaten; consumers must separately and ethically address these issues according to religious guidelines that encourage increased plant-based food in people's diets (Regenstein and Marinova, 2024). Meat is one of the main sources of protein in the diet, important for human health and development. Driven by the growth of income and the human population, a 14% overall increase in global meat consumption is expected by 2030 (Daszkiewicz, 2022). With the climate crisis destroying natural and agricultural resources, Earth's ecosystems may no longer support the expanded traditional meat industry. This has led companies to seek alternative solutions to conventional breeding methods to change the way we eat and think about meat. Global crises, whether economic, political, climatic, or health-related, create many challenges for the kosher food industry. Although there is increased interest in kosher products, the market must deal with rising production costs, supply chain disruptions, competition, and growing demands for sustainability and food health. To meet these challenges, kosher food manufacturers and distributors must be flexible and innovative, creating products that meet increasing consumer standards while battling rising costs and instabilities (Lever, Vandeventer, and Miele, 2022).

Currently, food is fertile ground for contamination and health problems. Therefore, the growth of the kosher food market is inevitable, especially due to consumers who are aware of health concerns, including lactose intolerance, celiac disease, and the increasing number of vegans and vegetarians (Hassoun et al., 2022). In a process that does not harm or at least minimally harms the environment, consumers focus on purchasing natural and fresh products, which are produced in the same way (Starobin and Weinthal, 2010). Advertising well-known brands and trademarks as kosher leads to a greater perception of quality among the mass market population, while both secular and religious Jews believe that a kosher certification is positive for health and quality (Cohen et al., 2002).

Although, according to 2023 data, there were 1,400 members of the Jewish faith living in Serbia (Jewish Virtual Library, 2024), the possibilities for Serbian companies and products with kosher certification are primarily focused on exports and foreign markets. The agricultural sector in the Republic of Serbia is on an upward trajectory with a strong focus on traditional and sustainable agriculture. With leaders such as the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Serbian Development Agency acting as ambassadors for product exports, the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Novi Sad is a leading institution in disseminating knowledge and innovations in the agricultural sector with several state-of-the-art experimental locations, including an edible insect farm, a cow-calf system farm, an advanced poultry experimental farm, and many others (EITFood, 2017).

KOSHER PRODUCTS MARKET

To cope with the new narrative of the global food supply chain, kashrut has evolved as an institution from local to global. Kosher products are popular not only among Jews but also among many non-Jewish consumers due to the perception of high quality and safety. Kosher food sales are expected to grow rapidly, with an average annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 6% over the next decade (Kosher Foods Market, 2022). A lifestyle of indulgence, with globally available recipes, as well as growing awareness of potential health risks, allergen-free, and gluten-free food products, leads to increased use of kosher-certified food. The kosher food market is segmented as follows:

- 1) by type: buckwheat, seafood, lamb, legumes, other types,
- 2) by distribution channel: supermarkets and hypermarkets, grocery stores, online stores,
- 3) by application: culinary products, snacks and savory products, bakery and confectionery products, meat, beverage additives, dietary products (The Business, 2024).

The production and certification of kosher products create jobs and economic activity, especially in regions with a large number of consumers. The U.S. market is the largest market for kosher-certified products, valued at \$200 billion, and companies can pay up to \$100,000 to private agencies to confirm that their products meet kosher standards (Fishkoff, 2010). After the U.S. market, the Asia-Pacific region is expected to be the fastest-

growing region due to increasing awareness and acceptance of kosher products. Chart 1 shows the distribution of the global kosher food market by region.

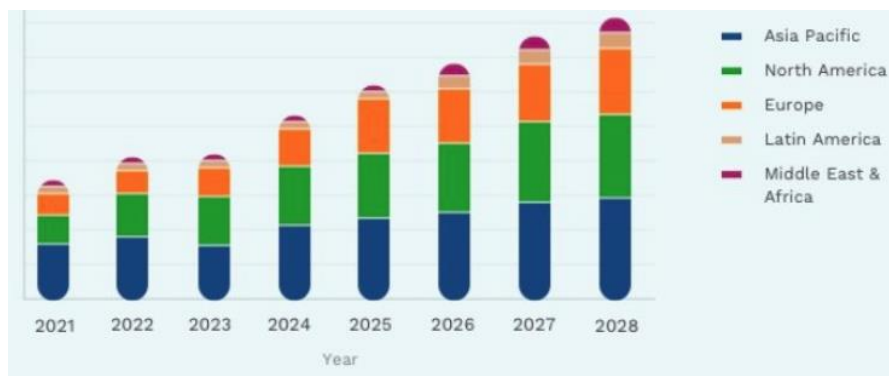


Chart 1. Size of the global kosher food market by region (Source: Kldb Kosher, 2023)

Kosher food is more expensive than non-kosher food, primarily due to the certification process, which incurs costs, as well as special processing and preparation procedures that increase production costs, specific kitchen equipment and utensils for kosher products, and limited supply, which can drive up prices due to higher demand and lower supply (Haaretz, 2011). Kosher, as a new trend in the food industry, is spreading to consumers of all religious communities. Products such as fruits and vegetables, grains, nuts, oil, and legumes are considered kosher, and it is easier to obtain a kosher certification for them. The size of the kosher food market in 2023 was estimated at 42.64 billion US dollars, and it is expected to grow to 78.55 billion by 2033 (Chart 2).

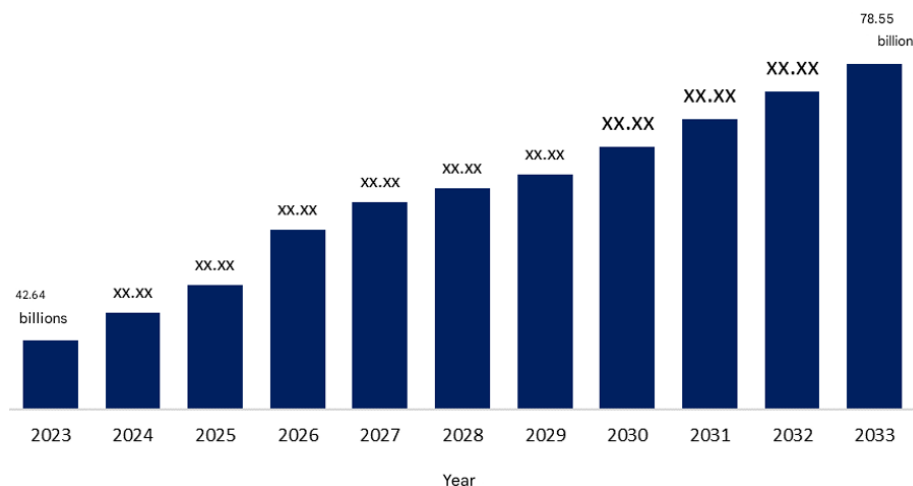


Chart 2. Global Kosher Food Market (Source: Kosher Foods Market, 2022)

This increase in consumption will be driven by the growth of the Jewish and Muslim populations (who share very similar dietary habits), increased penetration of retail channels, the rise in promotion of kosher-certified food, greater consumer spending, and increased demand for healthy food. The growth encourages manufacturers and distributors to adjust their production capacities and supply chains to meet the growing demand. However, the demand growth and global economic factors may affect the availability and prices of raw materials. Manufacturers and distributors must be ready to adapt to market changes in order to continue meeting the demand for kosher products (Kosher Foods Market, 2022).

To the best of our knowledge, there are no official data for the Serbian kosher food market; however, it is important to emphasize that the food industry is one of the main drivers of the Serbian economy, where the trade balance of agricultural products is consistently in surplus (Chart 3).

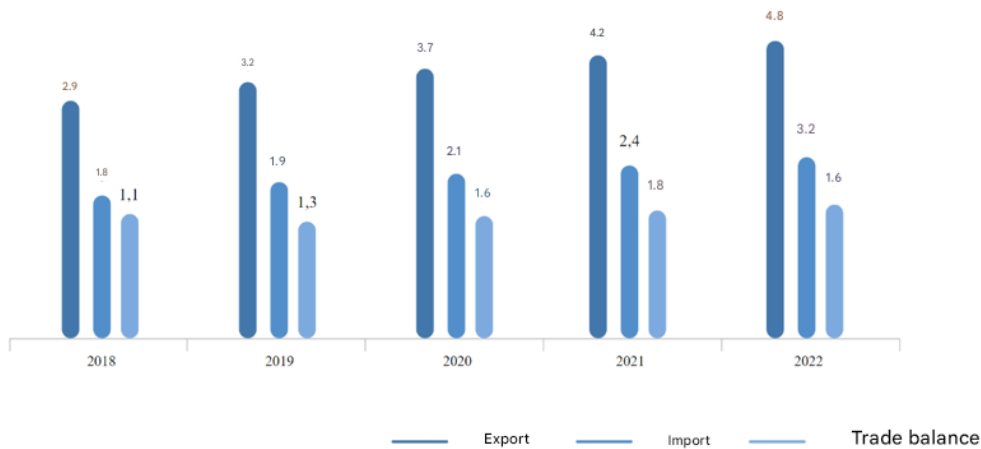


Chart 3. Foreign Trade (in billions of euros) (Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, 2023)

In Serbia, crop production and the food industry contribute about 9.4% of the gross domestic product, account for 14.5% of employment, and contribute 18% of total exports (FAO, 2023). One of the instruments for inclusivity and visibility focused on export products is through associations, such as NALED (National Alliance for Local Economic Development), which has formed alliances between local government units, associations, companies, and research institutions, with the programmatic goal of improving conditions for the development of agriculture and the food industry (EITFood, 2017).

Additionally, free zones provide special benefits for companies doing business in Serbia, where more than 200 companies operate in 15 free trade zones. The advantages of such business operations include duty-free imports of raw materials and equipment, preferential tax regimes (exemption from VAT on energy usage), unlimited import and export, as well as favorable business space rental conditions (Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, 2021).

KOSHER STANDARDS FOR FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT

In order to market their products in the kosher market, food manufacturers must provide proof of certification. The rise in certification and the development of international standards began as a response to the

global economy and the fragmentation of global production. According to the United States Court of Appeals, the increasing demand for kosher food, as well as competition among manufacturers, leads to the elasticity of professionalism and responsibility. In the coming period, efforts should focus on raising awareness among non-Jewish individuals regarding the identification of legitimate kosher certificates (Havinga, 2010), considering that “only” between one-fifth and one-third of kosher food consumers are Jewish (Regenstein, Chaudry, and Regenstein, 2003). Certification agencies have also established ethical codes, new forms of quality control, and the rise of a broad interdependent network among certifiers, both vertically up and down, which represents a key source of tracking (Starobin and Weinthal, 2010). The integrated concept of food safety is the only way to achieve the basic goals, ensuring a high level of protection for all in the food chain.

The most well-known standards for food safety on the market are ISO standards, which can be used in the production of kosher products but do not include specific requirements for kosher certification, considering that the production of kosher products requires additional steps and inspections that are not covered by ISO standards. ISO standards focus on the quality of management systems, process improvement, environmental management systems, workplace safety and health management systems, as well as ensuring that all processes (processing, packaging, and transport) meet high food safety standards (Popović, Vuković, and Ćosić, 2017).

HACCP certification (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) is a mandatory requirement for export-oriented food processing companies in Serbia, while the Serbian government provides various types of grants to assist companies in obtaining the necessary standards. The HACCP food safety management system is used in the production of kosher products, focusing on identifying and managing critical control points throughout the production process to reduce the risk of microbiological, chemical, and physicochemical contamination. In Serbia, Chabad Serbia provides kosher certificates for the food industry, and the largest European certification bodies (Eurocert, Certvalue, SGS, TUV, B2Bcert, and Bureau Veritas) have their offices in Serbia, along with domestic certification bodies (Development Agency of Serbia, 2018).

In addition to certificates such as ISO 9001:2008 or SRPS ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2008, ISO 22000:2009, HACCP, most export-oriented companies also hold international food standards (IFS), halal, GOST-R,

and/or BRC (British Retail Consortium) standards, which is the most well-known standard for large retail systems applied to every processing operation involving food handling (from the beginning of production, through slaughterhouses, to food processing in cans, as well as the production of highly hygienic products), depending on customer requirements. Currently, there are between 450 and 500 producers in Serbia who have the Global G.A.P. certification (which increases the competitiveness of companies in the global market by reducing barriers to international trade), and this number is steadily increasing. Most of them are export-oriented and involved in the production of fruits and vegetables (FAO, 2020).

In addition to the aforementioned standards, the principle of fair-trade practices is very important. Production based on this principle guarantees products that are not only in accordance with Jewish dietary laws but also support fair economic and social practices, as well as environmental preservation. The guarantee of food safety and quality is a fundamental prerequisite for successful access to domestic and foreign markets. Kosher certificates are ensured with the aim of differentiating products in the market to meet the specific requirements of certain customer categories (Popović, Vuković, and Ćosić, 2017).

Regarding the alignment of national regulations with the EU (European Union) in the fields of standardization and certification of agricultural products, the Republic of Serbia has defined an agricultural and rural development strategy. The legislative framework is based on the Law on Subsidies in Agriculture and Rural Development. The law prescribes the minimum subsidy amounts, while the financial framework for the implementation of subsidies is regulated by the Regulation on the Distribution of Subsidies in Agriculture and Rural Development, which allocates funds from the budget intended for agriculture for each fiscal year. As part of the national rural development support programs, subsidies are directed to registered farms for the introduction and certification of the aforementioned standards, organic products, as well as products bearing geographical indications and products with the "Serbian Quality" label (Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, 2023). Kosher standards in Serbia are implemented on a voluntary basis by organizations, primarily with the goal of expanding their markets, focusing on target groups that purchase this type of product, thus going beyond religious boundaries.

CATEGORIZATION OF KOSHER FOOD

Food production and nutrition are among the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Globalization has drawn attention to inequalities in food access and food quality issues, while also raising awareness about the importance of healthy and sustainably produced food. As stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), efforts must be made to achieve noble goals such as eradicating hunger, increasing food security, and sustainably managing natural resources (FAO, 2024). The kosher standard was developed to ensure that consumers can trust the kosher food products they use. The standard provides guidelines for the food industry, starting from the selection of raw materials, the method of slaughtering animals, to the production and processing of food. The basic rules that must be met for food products to be kosher are:

1. Use of meat from permissible animal species
2. Prohibition of the use of blood
3. Prohibition of mixing meat and dairy
4. Special rules for Passover (Clay et al., 2009).

The symbolism of milk relates to life, and meat relates to death, according to kosher standards. Therefore, life and death should not be connected, and meat and dairy products should not be combined. A time period of between one and six hours must pass between their consumption. In contrast, neutral food can be mixed with either meat or dairy, except for fish, which should not be mixed with meat. The three main categories of kosher food are:

1. Meat and meat products (Heb. Fleishig) – Meat from animals that have hooves and are ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, and deer), as well as certain types of poultry (chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys) are kosher. Rabbit meat and pork are never kosher. In order for these types of meat to be considered kosher, the animal must be slaughtered in a specific ritual manner, with the essence being to avoid causing pain to the animal. The slaughter is carried out by a specially trained person called a *shochet* (Heb. shochet), and it represents the most humane and painless method of animal slaughter (Clay et al., 2009).

2. Milk and dairy products (Heb. Milchig), as well as eggs, are kosher if they come from kosher animals (cow, sheep, goat) and do not contain non-kosher additives. Kosher cheese can be produced from the milk of kosher animals (Clay et al., 2009).

3. Neutral kosher food is called *Par(e)ve* and includes fruits, vegetables, grains, fish, teas, coffee, etc.

3.1. All types of fruit and vegetables are kosher if they are free from worms or insects. The exception applies to products made from grapes, which are not kosher. According to kosher laws, it is permissible to harvest fruits from trees that are older than three years (Heb. *Orlah*).

3.2. Grains can be *jasan* or *hadas* (old or new). If the grain is harvested before the holiday of Passover, it is called *hadas* and is forbidden to eat until the second day of Passover. After that, the grain is *jasan* and allowed for use. Every seventh (Heb. *Shmita*) year, when the land rests, no cultivation or harvesting takes place.

3.3. Fish that have fins and scales are kosher, such as cod, tuna, trout, and salmon, while other sea creatures like crabs, shellfish, octopuses, lobsters, etc., are not kosher. There is no special ritual for killing fish, but when purchasing them, it is essential that they have fins in order to meet kosher requirements (Clay et al., 2009).

The following factors may lead to the removal or addition of ingredients as kosher food:

1. New discoveries: If it is discovered that a particular ingredient or preparation method no longer meets strict religious standards, it may be removed from the list of kosher products.
2. New technologies and production methods: The development of new technologies and production methods can enable certain ingredients or food products to become kosher, as they can meet strict standards for purity and hygiene.
3. Rabbinical decisions: Religious authorities may make new rulings or interpretations that could add new foods to the list of kosher products or remove existing ones.
4. Geographical variations: Different parts of the world may have different practices and standards related to kosher food, which can lead to variations in what is considered kosher (Senter & Glass, 2016).

Challenges that may arise when implementing kosher requirements with local producers could relate to the lack of education in acquiring knowledge for obtaining kosher certification, although having the certification is only the basic step in beginning negotiations with interested parties. Producers should organize training for their employees and implement internal procedures to ensure compliance with kosher requirements. Collaboration with kosher certification organizations can also help ensure quality and expert training.

Kosher standards, which relate to specific religious and ethical guidelines regarding food production, provide a unique opportunity for Serbian producers to enter the global market with specialized, high-quality products. In the Republic of Serbia, in addition to the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Development Agency of Serbia, in cooperation with the Jewish community, it is important for certification bodies to also be involved in transferring knowledge (Serbian Chamber of Commerce, 2019).

As a practical example related to challenges in implementing kosher food requirements with local producers in Serbia, the case of the company "Dijamant doo Zrenjanin" can be taken. "Dijamant doo Zrenjanin" is the largest producer of edible oils and the leading producer of margarine, vegetable fats, mayonnaise, and mayonnaise-based delicatessen products in Serbia. Due to the increasing demand for kosher food in international markets, the company decided to implement kosher certification to expand its business and export products to Israel and the United States, where there is a significant number of consumers seeking kosher products (Dijamant, 2025).

Based on the best experience, as an internal ISO standard auditor, during the implementation of kosher requirements, the company encountered several challenges related to compliance with strict kosher rules. The challenges that could arise in production primarily relate to the separation of production lines for kosher and non-kosher products, as well as the packaging and transport of products. Additionally, ensuring additional training for employees to adhere to strict cleaning and disinfection rules between production cycles is imperative. Ensuring that all suppliers are compliant with kosher standards, as well as aligning internal procedures with kosher rules, is a necessity (Author).

PROCEDURE FOR KOSHER PRODUCT CERTIFICATION

As foodborne diseases increase, the idea that kosher products undergo additional inspections can enhance the perception of their higher quality and make it less likely that they will be contaminated with pathogens that cause illness (Hamerman, Schneider, and Rozensher, 2019). Proven origin impacts the popularity of kosher food. Given the strict rules for preparation and consumption, all consumers of this type of food can be confident that the ingredients are natural and free from artificial additives. Unlike GMO and organic certifications, which are overseen by the

executive authorities of individual countries, there are several Jewish religious organizations that certify products as kosher, with the most well-known being the "Big Five" (OU, OK Kosher, Star-K, Kof-K, and the Chicago Rabbinical Council), which control over 80% of the U.S. market (Fishkoff, 2010). Competition among certifiers encourages cost reduction by keeping their fees lower while maintaining high standards to protect their brand value and reputation among consumers. Private certification is often more efficient than government regulation, as it can offer greater technical expertise in determining how traditional kosher laws are applied to modern industrial food production. Rabbis who are experts in Jewish law advise kosher certification agencies in collaboration with managers with practical experience in various industries (Lytton, 2013).

The steps that must be followed to obtain certified kosher products should include:

- **Requirements related to raw materials and ingredients:** All raw materials and ingredients used in the production process must be kosher. The manufacturer creates a list of raw materials and ingredients that go into the final product, which must be approved by a kosher inspector. If the manufacturer produces both kosher and non-kosher products, the situation requires a review by kosher inspection and additional requirements for the manufacturer regarding the separation of production processes and the non-mixing of kosher and non-kosher raw materials and ingredients (Clay et al., 2009).
- **Requirements related to the production process:** Equipment used for the production of kosher products must not be used for non-kosher products without adequate sanitary conditions. The same applies when producing products with both milk and meat, as the mixing of dairy and meat products is prohibited. Equipment must be assessed as suitable for the production of kosher products (Clay et al., 2009).
- **Labeling:** Kosher products are recognized by having the "K" symbol on the packaging and other specific symbols that indicate the product is kosher (Regenstein, Chaudry, and Regenstein, 2003).
- **"Kosherization" of equipment:** This term refers to the process by which equipment is put into a neutral state after the production of meat or dairy products. If neutral products are produced first and then switched to meat or dairy, this occurs without any prior equipment preparation. However, when switching from meat or dairy production to neutral products, the "kosherization" process must be

carried out. This is done in the presence of a supervisor authorized by a rabbi. The equipment is washed with cold water and strong detergents. Materials such as ceramics, rubber, and porcelain cannot undergo this process as it is believed that impurities cannot be fully removed from them (Clay et al., 2009).

- **Certification process:** To obtain a kosher certificate, the applicant first submits a request to the Jewish community or an authorized rabbi, who represents the administrative and control body. The request includes documentation containing the manufacturer's intention, production technology, and a list of raw materials involved in the production process, after which the collected documents are forwarded to a certification agency, such as OU or ECK (European Central Kashrut). In the case of technologically simpler products, the rabbi personally inspects the product, while for more complex products, a representative from the certification body inspects them. It is easier to obtain a kosher certificate if the manufacturer already has implemented standards such as HACCP, Halal, etc. (Havinga, 2010).

Once the certificate is approved, the applicant receives two certificates: one from the local rabbi and another from ECK. During the validity of the certificate, unannounced inspections are conducted by the rabbi and ECK, which include checking raw materials, maintaining records, and ensuring proper hygiene of the facility and equipment. The kosher certificate is not permanent and is renewed annually or according to the production needs. If there is a change in the production process, raw materials, or equipment, a new inspection and verification are required (Havinga, 2010; Della Corte, Del Gaudio, and Sepe, 2018).

In the Republic of Serbia, the rabbi of the Jewish community is Yitshak Asiel, and he is the first instance in the previously described process of obtaining the certificate. Obtaining a kosher certificate is not inexpensive, as one working day of a technologist from ECK costs 500 euros or more, and the applicant also covers travel expenses. It is common practice for several companies applying for the certificate to join together and share the costs, which makes them significantly more affordable in that case. The price for issuing a kosher certificate in Serbia can vary depending on several factors, including the complexity of the product, the number of inspections and checks needed, and certain administrative costs (Božić, Bogdanov, and Ševarlić, 2011).

Having a kosher certificate enables companies to enter new markets and attract clients, thus building customer trust. Some companies in the

Republic of Serbia that have gone through the certification process and secured the placement of their products in the global market include: BMN Malinas, Euro Frigo, Frigo-Paun, ITN Group, Master fruits, and PIK Bečej (Frozen Food Anuga, 2021).

GLOBAL TRENDS IN DIETARY CHANGES

Nutrition has shifted from being an individual concern to a social issue. Since the second half of the 20th century until today, there have been changes in the way people eat and drink, accompanied by increases in obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Eating out with a high intake of processed foods and sugary drinks, combined with reduced physical activity and the growing trend of staying glued to chairs from which all necessary goods can be ordered, has led to such trends (Popkin et al., 2012). Over the next two and a half decades (until 2050), the world will face enormous food-related challenges, as it is projected that the global population will reach 9-11 billion people (Röös et al., 2017). Urbanization, rising income levels, dietary changes, and cultural and culinary preferences are driving the increased consumption of meat and dairy products (Westhoek et al., 2014). Key trends over the next decade include advancements in retail technology, growing demand for allergen-free options, increased rates of lactose intolerance, a rise in veganism among consumers, and advanced technologies such as nanotechnology and 3D printing (Hassoun et al., 2022; Miller, Scarlett, & Akanbi, 2024). The large-scale production of animal products such as milk, fish, meat, eggs, and their derivatives has been identified as a major contributor to the negative environmental impact of modern food supply systems (Poore & Nemecek, 2018).

Humans breathe, inhaling particles of methane and ammonia from the air, which can cause unwanted indications leading to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. These particles are products of food production, particularly from animal sources (Springmann et al., 2023). As a result, more consumers are seeking to reduce their consumption of animal-derived products. Increasing recognition of the challenges related to feeding a growing global population, while simultaneously producing food more sustainably, is driving innovations in the food system that will shape the future agricultural and food scene (Röös et al., 2017).

The strategy to reduce air pollution can be found in encouraging a plant-based diet, which has further implications for economic and health

outcomes (Westhoek et al., 2014; Springmann et al., 2023). Kosher plant-based food products adhere to kosher dietary laws while imitating the taste and texture of animal-derived food using only plant-based ingredients. In 2022, plant-based meat manufacturers achieved global sales of \$6.1 billion, while the conventional meat industry was valued at \$897 billion. Since 2020, more than 800 companies have either strictly produced plant-based food or had a brand or line dedicated to this category. Some of the leading companies in the market for plant-based foods include Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, Eat JUST, Kellogg, Maple Leaf Foods, Pinnacle Foods, Quorn Foods, Gardein, MorningStar Farms, The Vegetarian Butcher, Sunfed, Gold & Green, Boca Foods, Vbites Group, and Tofurky (Sentimedia, 2023).

Last mentioned, American producer of plant-based meat alternatives, launched a new generation of plant-based products in spring 2024, which will be welcomed with open arms by true vegans and vegetarians. The products are pre-seasoned, ready for reheating and serving, and provide a notable plant-based alternative for kosher consumers who wish to reduce meat consumption. The new products expand Tofurky's existing kosher plant-based offering, including deli meats, sausages, and ground meat (Tofurky, 2024).

To succeed in the long run, plant-based meat producers must achieve price parity with conventional meat and better replicate its taste and texture to reach consumers—omnivores who occasionally choose plant-based proteins. The greatest gain lies in recognizing the environmental, welfare, and health harms caused by diets full of animal-based meats and dairy products (Sentimedia, 2023).

Additionally, cultivated meat, produced by directly cultivating animal cells in bioreactors, presents an alternative. This production method largely eliminates the need for raising animals. The cultivated meat industry had already grown to over 150 companies across six continents by the end of 2022, with \$2.6 billion in investments, each aiming to produce cultivated meat products. This approach will use significantly fewer resources, reducing pollution, eutrophication related to agriculture, greenhouse gas emissions, and land use on an unprecedented scale. Expectations are that commercial production will be entirely antibiotic-free, potentially resulting in fewer cases of foodborne illnesses due to the absence of exposure to enteric pathogens. The decades ahead are expected to see cultivated meat and other alternative proteins taking a significant market share from the conventional meat and seafood industries, valued at \$1.7

trillion. This change will undoubtedly impact reduced deforestation related to agriculture, biodiversity loss, antibiotic resistance, zoonotic disease outbreaks, and industrialized animal slaughter (GFI, 2023).

The global market for cultivated meat is expected to reach \$2.1 billion by 2033, with 6-7 times increase by 2043. Singapore is currently the only country where cultivated meat can be legally sold, with the US likely to be the next. Some of the most established companies in the global cultivated meat market include Mosa Meat, Eat Just (GOOD Meat), UPSIDE Foods, Believer Meats, Multus Biotechnology, and BioBetter Ltd. (Labiotech, 2023).

The term "meat" has sparked significant debate in society. This name could complicate kosher labeling (Krone, 2022), as the religious status of this new product may largely depend on its production methods (e.g., cell source, other inputs) (Chriki et al., 2020; Hamdan et al., 2021). Other stakeholders, such as some conventional meat producers, may also oppose the use of the term "meat" in connection with cell-based food (Faustman et al., 2020).

Cell-based meat does not involve the slaughter of large numbers of animals, so it could be considered to have no ritual connection such as halal or kosher. However, the initial source of the cells and biopsies for initial cell cultures will surely influence consumer perception and decision-making (Ching et al., 2022; Jahir, 2023). For this reason, the decision of the rabbinical organization Tzohar was that cultivated meat, whose initial cells come from embryonic stem cells taken from a bovine blastomere, is considered kosher. Such meat is classified as Par(e)ve and can be eaten with dairy products (Tzohar, 2022).

Some argue that such labeling depends on which exact cell and materials were used throughout the entire production process. Some rabbinical authorities consider stem cells taken from non-kosher animals to be forbidden, while others allow it, as in the case of gelatin (Dadon, 2022). The cultural meaning and current regulatory definitions of the term "meat" vary by region (Ong et al., 2020), so the use of the term "meat" to refer to a cell-based food product may not be acceptable in all regions (Hansen et al., 2021).

KOSHER AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FOOD PRODUCERS IN SERBIA

Agriculture and food production in Serbia have a long tradition. The ideal climate for vegetable production makes Serbia a major exporter of vegetables and a supplier for Southeastern Europe. The most popular vegetables produced in Serbia are: peppers, cabbage, tomatoes, and potatoes.

Additionally, in recent years, the production of green peas and sweet corn has been steadily increasing due to the rising consumption of frozen ready meals worldwide. Fruit production is one of the key subsectors of Serbia's economic development and, as such, it receives strategic attention from the Serbian government. In 2022, the export of frozen raspberries, blackberries, mulberries, etc., represented 26.4% of the global export, which ranks Serbia first in the world as the largest supplier of this product group. Serbia is among the top three suppliers of frozen fruit to Germany, France, and the United States. About 90-95% of raspberry production is intended for export, mainly in bulk (Serbia Development Agency, 2022).

The Republic of Serbia is a signatory to the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), CEFTA, EFTA, Free Trade Agreements: between Serbia and Russia, Serbia and Belarus, Serbia and Kazakhstan, Serbia and Armenia, Serbia and Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Turkey, Serbia and the United Kingdom, and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) in terms of foreign trade with the United States, Japan, and Australia. Thanks to these agreements, Serbia has the opportunity to export its products under a duty-free regime, which is one of its competitive advantages, alongside its geographical location, educated and skilled workforce at competitive prices, etc. This enables simplified market access to over 1.3 billion people (Gulfood, 2024), as shown in Chart 4.

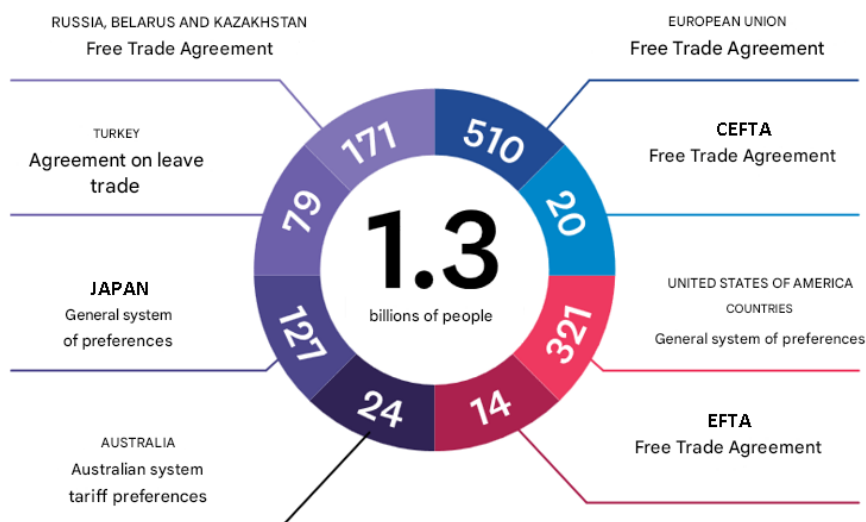


Chart 4. Countries Signatory to the Common Market Agreement with the Republic of Serbia (Source: Frozen Food Anuga, 2021)

Foreign trade in goods was highest with the countries with which Serbia has signed free trade agreements. The most important trading partner of Serbia is the EU. Exports to EU countries account for 55% of Serbia's total agricultural exports, while imports from the EU represent 50% of Serbia's total agricultural imports (Table 1).

Table 1. Agricultural and food trade partners of Serbia (Source: International Trade Administration, 2024)

	Export	Import
EU	55%	50%
CEFTA	40%	35%
Other countries	5%	15%

In 2023, the import of all products into Serbia amounted to 39.66 billion dollars, which is a 3.2% decrease compared to the same period of the previous year. The export value reached 30.79 billion dollars, representing a 6.5% increase compared to the same period of the previous year (Trademap, 2023). Serbia has the potential to increase the export of kosher products through strategic measures such as increasing production, improving certification, promoting on international markets, investing in logistics and infrastructure, and developing innovative products. By utilizing diplomacy and collaborating with international partners, as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, Serbia can become a more competitive player in the global kosher food market. In the Republic of Serbia, dozens of companies are involved in the production and distribution of kosher products. Some of them include: Cold Pressok, Flory, Frucom food, Geneza, ITN group, Master food, Master fruits, Sirogojno Co., Stanić (Gulfood, 2024). These companies are registered with the Jewish community of Serbia and hold kosher certification, allowing them to meet the demands of consumers worldwide.

In order for Serbian companies to improve their visibility in the global kosher food market, they need to focus on several key areas, including product quality, branding strategies, digital presence, and compliance with global standards. The opportunity for producers from the Republic of Serbia lies in organization and access to the global market.

At the end of the last decade of the new millennium, the Republic of Serbia began showcasing kosher products at the exhibition in Israel, thus opening itself to the market. The driving force behind this initiative were the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Serbian Development Agency, through which companies presented their products. Participation in the fair allowed exhibitors from Serbia to network directly with suppliers and service providers, create business opportunities, present products and new technologies, and explore innovations (Serbian Chamber of Commerce, 2019). Some of the most well-known fairs in which the Republic of Serbia participates include: SIAL (Paris), Anuga (Cologne), PRODEXPO (Moscow), GULFOOD (Dubai), and FOODEX JAPAN (Tokyo).

CONCLUSION

Kosher food, with its strict rules and regulations, can serve as a good model for healthy eating, in terms of quality control, reduced intake of unhealthy ingredients, better hygienic preparation, and an ethical approach to nutrition.

Global trends in nutrition are rapidly evolving, whether for members of the Jewish faith or not, driven by increasing interest in health, sustainability, technology, culinary trends, and personalized diets free from allergens, celiac disease, and lactose intolerance, including vegans and vegetarians.

Due to the growing importance of certifications and international standards in recent decades, the kosher economy is undoubtedly an example of expansion with significant acceptance of kosher food in the global food industry. It is projected that the size of the kosher food market will show a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 6% in the decade ahead. Given the continued population growth in the coming period, there will be an additional need for protein consumption in diets, driving the global food market to offer plant-based alternatives to meat products to meet the growing demand for health-conscious and environmentally friendly options while adhering to strict kosher guidelines. Furthermore, there has been a reevaluation of some core principles within Jewish culture regarding new, cultured products based on embryonic stem cells from kosher animals, which has extended to the religious and scientific communities. The cultural significance and current regulatory names for the term “meat” vary depending on the region, and it remains to be seen how it will be accepted.

Cultivated food is an innovative response to the challenges of traditional meat production, such as ethical dilemmas related to animal slaughter, the environmental impact of livestock farming, and the growing global demand for food. Food producers who successfully address these changes and develop products that meet the new needs of consumers can become leaders in the industry.

The plan to increase the production and export of kosher food from Serbia should be based on compliance with kosher standards as a competitive advantage in markets that value high quality, safety, and specialized products, along with an effective marketing strategy and global distribution.

The Republic of Serbia is a signatory of many free trade agreements that cover a population of 1.3 billion people, providing an opportunity for global presence. Serbia is known for exporting frozen vegetables and fruits, especially berries. Kosher-certified companies are increasing exports and also making joint investments in the food industry with foreign partners.

The current growing food production presents a favorable opportunity for Serbian food producers to expand their businesses by offering kosher-certified products to clients. Participation in globally recognized food fairs only strengthens the status of the Republic of Serbia as an export-oriented country.

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KOŠER HRANA U SVETLU IZAZOVA GLOBALNE PROMENE NAČINA ISHRANE

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Sažetak: U današnjem poimanju brzo rastuće svetske populacije, kao i svesnosti zdrave i održive ishrane, potreba za modifikacijom tržišta, prilagođavanjem standarda proizvodnje i inovacija u promeni ishrane postaje prioritet za proizvođače hrane. Analiza rada usmerena je na košer tržište koje strelovito proširuje ogroman potrošački okvir te procedure koje zainteresovani proizvođači hrane treba da ispune implementirajući košer standard. Cilj rada je da pruži uvid u mogućnosti potencijala košer standarda kao strategije za diseminaciju tržišta i povećanje konkurentnosti proizvođača hrane u Republici Srbiji. Opisna analiza korišćena je radi davanja važnosti narativu izazova globalne promene načina ishrane, uključujući meso bilnog porekla i kultivisanog mesa. Evidentno je da košer sertifikacija može biti održiva strategija za prevazilaženje aktuelnih izazova u načinu ishrane kakvu danas poznajemo, naglašavajući njenu relevantnost ne samo za potrošače jevrejskog porekla, već i za globalno tržište u kojemu preovladavaju kvalitet i transparentnost.

Ključne reči: zdrava i održiva ishrana, košer tržište, košer standard, košer sertifikacija, Republika Srbija, meso bilnog porekla, kultivisano meso, globalno tržište.