

JOFA Advocacy News

This is the third in a new series aimed to promote discussions about issues important to the JOFA community. We will send out articles on a regular basis that we think will resonate with you. If you see any articles of interest, please forward them to jofa@jofa.org.

The following article appeared in the newsletter, *Kosher Today*, in its May 4th edition:

Women Lauded as Kosher Supervisors

Baltimore...by Raffi Rosenzweig...The Star-K Kashrus agency is planning its first ever training event for women as kosher supervisors (mashgichot). The major Baltimore, MD based agency currently runs a men's seminar each year, although it is geared mostly to Rabbanim and the heads of kashrus agencies. The planned women's conference in the Fall, is for women that serve as mashgichot in the food service industry, mostly at catering halls and restaurants. The program will teach proper procedures for checking vegetables, explain the dynamics of the kitchen, review policies and procedures, and draw attention to specific issues mashgichot should be aware of. The seminar will also include trips to various facilities for a more "hands-on" approach.

"I am so excited [about the planned conference]," said Yael Kaner, the head mashgicha at the Pearlstone Conference and Retreat Center. "For all these years I watched men go to these conferences. Now finally this is the answer." Kaner is also a baker at Pearlstone, an all-kosher organic farm in Maryland, and incorporates her Sephardic heritage in making many ethnic dishes. Brimming with enthusiasm for her job, she views her position as an unrivaled opportunity to do what she loves and to teach about Judaism and kashrus. Kaner is particularly eager to meet other mashgichot at the training seminar. "I want to get to know other women who are as passionate about it [kashrus work] as I am," she said. The seminar was prompted by requests from mashgichot working in Israel who requested better preparation. Rabbi Mayer Kurcfield, a Kashrus Administrator at the Star-K, explained that the conference is designed to help smaller, far-away communities, which may rely on women mashgichot more heavily than cities with larger kosher infrastructures where there is an ample supply of men mashgichim. Shifra Wollner, who works as a mashgicha at Pearlstone and at a nursing home, sees great potential in the seminar. "I always want to learn more and update my skills," she said. "I'm also hoping that practical standards will be outlined so that everyone is on the same exact wavelength."

The practice of using women for kashrus supervision, for which the Star-K relies on a ruling of the late sage Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, is growing. "Women

are often more meticulous in their supervision," said Rabbi Kurcfeld. "Even the slightest deviation will not be tolerated, which is a tremendous plus." Rabbi Kurcfeld also explained that although one might expect women to have a harder time gaining respect in the kitchen, that is not the case. "You are only as good as who you are-you either have it or you don't," he said. "If you present yourself in a way that shows you are knowledgeable, sensible and have integrity, the workers will sense that." "Besides," he added, "who do you think takes care of the personal hashgacha in the home of Rav Heinemann (referring to Rabbi Moshe Heinemann, the Rabbinic Administrator of the Star-K)?" Many local kashrus committees expect the trend of hiring women as kosher supervisors to continue to increase.

**Join the conversation at the JOFA Conference
Saturday Evening, March 13 & Sunday, March 14, 2010
Columbia University, New York City**



520 Eighth Avenue, 4th Fl. New York, NY 10018
212-679-8500/ jofa@jofa.org / www.jofa.org

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