Rabbi Hisiger: Hello everyone and welcome back to Let's Talk Kashrus, presented by the Kashrus Awareness Project in conjunction with TorahAnytime. Today I am privileged to be joined by R’ Sholom Tendler, Kashrus Administrator at the STAR-K in Baltimore. Thank you R’ Tendler for joining us once again.

Rabbi Tendler: Pleasure to be back.

Rabbi Hisiger: So we're here to discuss the topic of Yoshon today, and before we get into the particulars of what viewers may want to know about this particular season and which items are of greater concern or lesser concern, give us a very brief summary of what Yoshon is and the related הלכות.

Rabbi Tendler: Okay sure, as I say it's an old topic, it's nothing new, everyone's heard that pun a million times before, but the fact remains that ישן is a פסוק in the תורה and basically what it boils down to is the following thing, is that every year the crop, the new crop is harvested in the summer. Crops get planted in the springtime, חדש האביב, חג האביב and then חג הקציר, the summertime when crops are harvested. At least in North America and the United States, that means July-August is when every year the new crop is harvested. You go to the supermarket, you find the new fruits are on the shelf, that's when all the new produce that's for that season comes on the market. So what the תורה is saying is that the new crop that's harvested from the חמשת המינים, wheat, oat, barley, rye and spelt, is not allowed to be eaten for the next six to eight months until after next year פסח. So everything that was harvested two months ago, a month, two months ago, is not allowed to be eaten until after next year פסח. So the new crop that's coming in is called חדש. The crop that's still remaining from last year is what's known as ישן and that's why it's called old. It has nothing to do with freshness, I made that joke before, it has nothing to do with how fresh the food is, whether it's stale or not stale, that's how it works, what's the new crop and what's the old crop.

Rabbi Hisiger: Just for accuracy's sake, in the time of the בית המקדש, it was until after the עומר was brought, the first day of פסח, now we're referring to it generally as being after פסח.

Rabbi Tendler: Correct, because it happens to be all מצה is going to be ישן, and there's not really any other חמשת המינים products that you can eat on פסח at that point, so in essence it's still פסח and then after פסח is when ישן season so to speak ends and then starts again right around now.

Rabbi Hisiger: Let's dive right into this season now. I know people know that there are different items, oats and others, where the ישן season either starts early or late and people are cognizant of that fact and they're aware that if they're going to the supermarket, for years people were stocking up on certain items because they were concerned about that. What updates could you give us on specific items?

Rabbi Tendler: So first as far as before we get to the actual specific items for a second, I just want to comment what you said about stocking up, is that I generally discourage people from stocking up on many common items, at least on the East Coast area, you know New York down to Baltimore, this whole region, because there's very few products, and I'm talking about not necessarily Jewish products that you can't get the entire year, or at least you can't get until much later in the season. The reason for that is because what we're generally looking at now that the כשרות agencies have kind of taken over the monitoring of the ישן situation, the resources that we have available to us, which means we have משגיחים who are going into all the plants, so we no longer have to guess or use estimates based on harvest times, we actually can go to the plant and say when are you getting in the new crop for this year, and they know exactly, because every year the crops are different, the protein content, things are different in the crop, and they have to make adjustments to the recipes based on that, so they know, most companies that process, make cookies, pastas, they know exactly when they are getting a new crop and exactly when they're starting to use it, so we try as much as possible to go with those dates and get those dates that are as accurate as possible, so while the old, we're still punning all along here, while the old method of doing things was just basically using estimates based on crop harvest time, and then estimating how long it takes, now we know exactly when that is, so if you go back to when the crops were harvested, let's say July, August, which again varies depending on the weather, depending where it's from, it takes time until that crop actually gets into process to be used in cookies or pasta or anything like that, and we're able to monitor the mills, and not only just the mills, there's specific mills that handle pasta companies, and specific mills that handle cookie companies, so we know exactly all along that way when that crop is entering the process, so we can push the date when consumers have to start worrying about this as late as possible, which is always very helpful to know, so that's why the date we're giving right now, when ישן season officially starts, is actually today, September 15th, which is basically, from our understanding, most companies by this week will have gotten in, most companies that we spoke to at least, not just flour companies, pasta companies, cookie companies, are getting in right around now, the new crop of flour that they're going to start using, you know, after that, how long it takes from the time they start, until it hits the shelves, will be some time, so it's very unlikely that this week you're actually going to find חדש, anything except flour, flour is a different story, flour comes in much faster obviously, but pasta, cookies, anything like that, it's very unlikely you'd find it this week already on the market, but we can't tell you exactly when it's going to hit the shelves, because after the manufacturing goes to distribution, it's hard to know, it takes time, but it also could go fast, so we don't know exactly, so we're telling people this week already, they should start checking dates, and the dates are, you know, some of these were released today already, some of them are going to be released over the next two days, and the way the process works is that we're going to give general dates based on about September 15th for the cutoff date, as far as the manufacturing, so for example, if you're going to go to the store this week and look at a package of cookies, we're going to tell you as long as you look at the date, and we'll give you the date code, it was manufactured before September 15th, it's for sure ישן, after, we can't tell you, now, in a few weeks from now, we might have information from Stella D’oro, or any of these other cookie companies to know exactly when they started, in which case we'll update it, in which case the dates will get pushed off later, so that will evolve over the next few weeks, that information.

Rabbi Hisiger: Now, to clarify, you're talking about people getting these dates and getting this information, what is the best way for people to access that info?

Rabbi Tendler: www.yoshon.com, ישן.com, I mean, all the agencies, including the STAR-K, we have websites, a ישן page on our website, which culls the information that we're providing to yoshon.com, it puts it, you know, yoshon.com is really the best resource for all the information, they have the lists which are going to be made into a PDF file and will be emailed out to anyone who signs up, so there will be paper copies available, you know, hard copies available, I mean, hard to say, hard copies available, they're going to be sent out as a PDF email on their website, through their app, and for those who also don't have access to any of those modes, so in many cities, in Lakewood, Baltimore, Chicago, there will be pickup points that's going to be listed in the email that was sent out today, where people can pick up a physical hard copy of the list.

Rabbi Hisiger: I want to go back to something you said before about stocking up, you don't recommend stocking up, now, I don't know if I revealed something, but stocking up really is a memory of my youth, and it was a different world then. People would indeed stock up on pasta, I remember oatmeal, and things of that sort, to have enough to last them till פסח, and you know, over the years, first of all, more and more people today keep ישן, how would you describe in brief what changed from then to today, just as far as availability, and you alluded to before about the availability, not just the product, but of information.

Rabbi Tendler: Right, what's happening now is, like you said, more and more people, I don't like to say the term ישן's becoming more popular, you know, it's hard to say that about a מצוה, something in the תורה, but it's definitely becoming more aware of this issue of ישן, and the fact that information is becoming more and more available in a clear fashion, makes it so much easier for people to keep ישן, and what I mentioned before also, you said about being list written on the product, that's true, but a lot of the Jewish companies, they are writing ישן on it, but even by the non-Jewish companies, just because we know more about the industry, we're able to ascertain much more clearly what things are 100% ישן, and also what things maybe not, and these sometimes are things that are available all year round, I'll give you some quick examples, let's start with the kids, pretzels, roll gold pretzels, roll gold pretzels is a very popular pretzel, non-Jewish company, it's found anywhere in the United States of America, every rest stop, roll gold pretzels, 100% winter wheat, which means they're 100% ישן, all year long, so for those who don't know what winter wheat is, I think we threw that term out really fast, winter wheat is wheat that was planted in October, September, October, sits dormant in the ground until the summer, so since it sat through פסח, it's always ישן, spring wheat, which is the one that's typically used for breads, is planted in the spring, you know, April, never happened so far that it was planted before פסח, so we never got that lucky, and it's harvested in the summer, so spring wheat is always a ישן problem, and winter wheat is never a ישן problem.

Rabbi Hisiger: Is it a different consistency that they like to use winter wheat?

Rabbi Tendler: It could be, the protein content is different, typically for things like pretzels, you'll want to use the winter wheat, but I want to say this very carefully, it's not exclusively true, you can't just assume something like a pretzel or cracker is going to winter wheat, because a lot of companies blend, I have companies that we certify, I know for a fact, they blend winter and spring wheat in a pretzel, so you can't know for sure, but again, as I was saying, just information we know, since we're working directly with the manufacturers, we have much more clear information. So roll gold happens to be for winter wheat. And then you have a company like Pillsbury, Pillsbury, this is fresh information, literally, new information, Pillsbury retail five pound bags of flour, you find in every supermarket in the country, the all-purpose flour, and the bread flour, are all made in a mill that only processes winter wheat, so it's exclusively winter wheat product, so this is something that anyone...

Rabbi Hisiger: So if you're in a store, you don't have access to yoshon.com, you don't have the guide to חדש, you don't have an item that says, you know, קמח יושן on it, but you see Pillsbury flour, five pounds, you're good to go.

Rabbi Tendler: Again, not necessarily a whole wheat, and the all-purpose and the bread, whole wheat is a different story. The old, the old, we love throwing this term around, right, the old information everyone always said about the general mills, the gold medal KC mill, which is the Kansas City mill, everyone assumed that that was ישן, now it does happen to be true, that the KC mill processes all-purpose flour and bread flour exclusively using winter wheat, however, that mill is a shared mill, they do process חדש on that same mill, and that, everyone can decide from the sales whether they want to be מחמיר about it or not, but it's not an exclusive mill. From what information I was just given today, actually, the Pillsbury all-purpose and bread flour is made at a mill that is exclusive for winter wheat, there's also some other ones on the list, I believe Hecker's also, is flour that's also produced exclusively from winter wheat, so you don't need to stock up, these are flours you can find anywhere in the country, and a lot of flours also, you know, the turnaround is not so strong, for example, a lot of the big stores target Walmart, right, we have very clear dates on when these flours turn over, and, you know, it's not like a heimeshe store where you're going to, people are buying bread flour for חלה every single week, you can find a target in a random place, chances are you're going to be able to find ישן flour available there in one form or another, so, and then in the frum communities on the East Coast, for sure, since it's so popular now, the stores make sure to keep stocks of it, and it's certainly better for the stores to keep stocks of it than for you to keep stocks of it at home, because they make sure, for infestation reasons, they keep, and also you don't have space, I mean, if you have space, you don't have to, but I'm saying infestation reasons becomes a big problem sometimes, when people stock up too much, and then you end up coming to פסח, you still have a pallet left in your basement, it just becomes a whole issue, so therefore, you know, I have found personally, I could say, the last many years, there was almost nothing that I found I needed to stock up on, maybe oatmeal, maybe some oatmeal, but now they have oatmeal from ארץ ישראל, that a lot of stores bring in, which is always ישן, so again, you know, it's not something that people necessarily need to be running to the stores to stock up on, again, in the East Coast, for sure, and even the rest of the country, if you follow the list, you can generally find things that are going to be ישן all season long.

Rabbi Hisiger: So an interesting thing I wanted to ask about was cut-off dates and expiration dates, very often the כשרות agencies will give out cut-off dates that don't seem to correlate with the expiration dates, what are these dates, and how do we read them properly? So we try as much as possible to tell people information that you need to look for on the package, so if we tell you on a package you should look for 2594, that is a code, which basically is a Julian date, for example, 259 is the 259th day of the year, which some companies use as an expiration date for their product, and then 4 would be 2024, sometimes it's 5, so if you look, let's say, at our quick guide or in the ישן guide, you will see some products will say, look for 2595, if you see 2595, which in that case means, I believe that is September 15th, actually, of 2025, if you see 2595 or lower, that means it was produced before today, that's what that means. So we try as much as possible not to give you the whole torah behind it, this one's 12 months, 18 months, 12 months and 5 days, we don't want to confuse people, just to give you the exact date to look for, so in general, the date we give you is the date to look for, either that date or earlier, and that is for sure, and then that product is guaranteed to be ישן.

Rabbi Hisiger: It seems that oat is getting a later date than usual, is there a reason for that on the production end, is there something that changed in the industry?

Rabbi Tendler: So the oats is interesting, oats historically seemed to have been one of the earlier things that was assumed to become חדש right away, but now what it seems is not like that, and part of that is because all the food grade oats that are used, I don't want to say all, but most, the bulk of the food grade oats that are used come from Canada, not grown in the United States, so even though we were always monitoring the United States harvest, it seems that that was not necessarily correct, those are all the animal grade oats, predominantly the food grade oats are coming from Canada, which just because of the way the weather is, it comes from Western Canada, which is much later, because colder harvest only grows much later, so that's why oats really are now one of the later things to become חדש. That's interesting, interesting development. At the same time, I just want to mention on that, one of the big questions we get is Cheerios, the oldest cereal, and still the question is on Cheerios, it's a very popular cereal, Cheerios, it varies, every year is different when they get it in, last year, people remember the date for Cheerios, which is what General Mills told us, they are not getting in the חדש oats until sometime it was in December, this year they're getting it in September 30th, which hasn't happened yet, but they know already they're getting it in September 30th, so we have that date going to be listed in the guide, so just because oats come in later, when the companies actually start using it, again, as I mentioned earlier before, couldn't vary, and that's what we're going to try to do as much as possible, to get really as accurate information, this way, the product becomes much more available when we can push the dates off as late as possible.

Rabbi Hisiger: One final question, other items that also seem to be much later, specifically our malt and beer, does that also have to do with where it's made and production-wise?

Rabbi Tendler: It does somewhat, meaning barley kind of follows wheat, the cutoff we're giving for barley is also today, right around now, September 15th, but malt is kind of a long type of process. Before the malt ends up being the product, the malt, the barley flour, whatever it is that's used in flour or as an enrichment or whatever it is, it takes time to process that, and that's something where it ferments, and then they have to mill it into a flour and it probably hits the market, it takes a lot longer, it's a longer process. The estimates that have always been around historically were December 15th for malt, we're working on that this year to try to figure out, it does kind of make sense, we're going to see if we can try to figure that out a little bit better, but it does kind of make sense to say that malt will take until sometime in December until the חדש malt becomes on the market, and beer kind of also follows the same path, the beer, a lot of the breweries we discussed are not yet getting in the new crop yet, it was just harvested, it takes time for them to get it in, and then it takes a couple of weeks to make the beer until it hits the market, so it doesn't seem like one of the big breweries that we work with, that we certify, they start using the new malted barley usually around Thanksgiving time, so by the time that hits the market, again, end of December, January time, so that's why those things are kind of pushed off, but we have some time for that, and by the time that rolls around, hopefully we'll have some more clear information.

Rabbi Hisiger: Very interesting. Any final thoughts on this topic of ישן in the coming year, תשפ״ה?

Rabbi Tendler: So, again, as you mentioned, it's something that's becoming easier and easier, it's definitely a little bit לא בשמים היא, I'm not here to tell people what to do and what not to do, it's a personal preference, speak to your own רב, whether you should be מקפיד ישן, not מקפיד ישן, our job as the כשרות agencies, and I will mention, it's a project, a joint project, bipartisan, all agencies together, it's something we're all spending a lot of time and working on to clarify the information, to make it as accessible as possible and make it as user-friendly as possible, with, you know, partnering with yoshon.com, who already has a great website and app and information, and, you know, we're hoping that this will increase its availability and make it as easy as possible for people to be מקפיד ישן.

Rabbi Hisiger: And I'll add to what you said that, you know, most of the conversations that we have here on Let's Talk אש״ס are more general, we don't always do such specific topical type of topics, נוגע to the זמן, to the time, and because I don't know when people will be watching or listening to this, maybe in a year or two from now, they should know that a lot of what we discussed, obviously, today is germane to this particular time period, and obviously people have to stay up to date, and depending on when they're listening to it or watching it, they should make sure to avail themselves of the most up-to-date information, like you mentioned, whether it's from the particular כשרות agencies or going to yoshon.com to get the most up-to-date information.

Rabbi Tendler: Right, exactly, and that's the, you know, that's, again, like you said, the information will change from year to year, but I think it seems by now the process that we have of being in communication with the companies, all the agencies, sharing the information together, it's a system that seems to be working very well, and at this point, moving forward, we're just going to keep updating the information for people to be able to access.

Rabbi Hisiger: Well, we thank you for doing that, we thank you for being on top of it together with the other agencies in a unified effort to help כלל ישראל keep this very important מצוה. So, כל הכבוד, and thank you for being here.