

The Kashrus Status of Raw Fish on Pesach
Rabbi Sholem Fishbane

Of the many food items that grace our Shabbos and Yom Tov tables, almost nothing can spoil faster than fish. Even when the fish is no longer *oif de velt*, the enzymes that helped transfer the essential sugars and amino acids from the live fish's lunch to its muscles do not die with the fish. These active enzymes rapidly bring out self-digestion, affecting the flavor, texture and appearance of the fish.

To this end, the customer is generally careful to only purchase healthy and wholesome looking fish. Manufactures of frozen fish have developed some innovative methods to keep their final product appealing, despite the natural obstacles they face. "Blast freezing" and "glazing" have been proven to be the best methods for preserving fish to maintain the attractive look and feel of fresh fish.

"Blast freezing" means to flash freeze the fish at minus 25° Fahrenheit, which instantly stops the aging of the fish. The fish does not regain its natural aging until it is thawed by the processor who converts it to individual packaging, or your local fish store who thaws and fillets it, or places it whole on a bed of ice.

Before the blast freezing, many manufactures glaze the fish by dipping each fish in an ice water solution, which protects the fish from dehydration while in cold storage. Some manufactures glaze with pure ice water, while others add salt, sugar, or corn syrup solids to the water. One popular salmon company that adds both salt and corn syrup granules explained that the "salt softens the glaze to keep chipping from occurring and the soluble corn syrup adds viscosity for better adherence." In simpler terms, the corn syrup makes the glaze freeze evenly and assists in binding the ice to the fish. Aside from helping prevent "freezer burn," the glaze also acts as a barrier so that the fish do not stick to each other.

For those that do not eat *kitniyos* on Pesach, the question arises if one should be concerned, when purchasing raw fish, that the fish may have some corn syrup residue. To answer this, we need to delve further into the glazing process. In order to thaw frozen fish so that it appears as if it was caught that very morning, the purveyor must take special care to do so properly. Rapid thawing causes the cell walls of the fish to burst, resulting in loss of moisture and damaged fish. This means that improper thawing can result in dryness, off flavors, or even spoiling of the fish. Therefore, it is not recommended to thaw the fish via heat, but to slowly thaw it in cold water. Many processors thaw the glazed fish in a large vat of cold water, with air circulating through it. As the fish thaw, the water slowly takes in the melted corn syrup glaze. Luckily, the fish do not sit in the vat for more than 24 hours, so there is no issue of *kovush*, however, there is a slight residue of corn syrup that remains on the fish.

We at the cRc have done extensive research on this issue by visiting cRc certified manufacturers, contacting other manufacturers, contacting other mashgichim, and last but not least, by sending random fish samples for lab testing. Our research has shown that

corn syrup glaze is primarily used only on Alaskan Wild Salmon. The fishing season is so short in Alaska that they need superior methods of freezing and shipping to preserve the quality of the fish for the rest of the year. Indeed, we have found that salmon coming from Chili does not have these issues, as they are only glazing with salt water.

In truth, even the fish that is glazed with corn syrup is 100% *mutar* to eat on *Pesach*, as the amount of corn syrup added is always well below the *shiur* of *bitul*, which for *kitniyos* is *bitul b'rov* (*Rema 453:1 as per Mishnah Berurah 453:9.*) However, as with many items in *kashrus* – and specifically on *Pesach* - many people would rather not consume items that need an article such as this to explain why it is ok to eat. They would rather buy something that has no *shailos* to start off with – even though the product in question is 100% *mutar* to eat according to *halacha*.

For those that would like to avoid such fish, as previously mentioned, you are safe if you choose the Chilean salmon, or fresh fish in the market. When you see fish in the grocery store labeled “previously frozen,” but it is unfrozen in the refrigerator section, it usually means the whole fish has been thawed, either by a processor or by the grocery chain's seafood preparation area. These may have been glazed with the corn syrup, although it is *botul*.

On behalf of myself and everyone at the Chicago Rabbinical Council, I wanted to wish everyone a *chag kosher v'sameach*.

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane is the Kashrus Administrator of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.