

STAR-K Guidelines for Purchasing Fresh Fish

July 26, 2022

STAR-K receives many questions about purchasing fresh fish from non-kosher stores or sources. We hope this brief article will help clarify some of the confusion regarding this topic.

The Halacha is that for fish to be kosher, it needs to have fins and scales¹. Furthermore, there is a rabbinic prohibition² to consume fish that has had the *simanei kashrus*, i.e. scales³ removed (e.g., a skinless fish fillet) without a *Yehudi* having seen that that it was a kosher fish.

Stores with Kosher Supervision

In stores or companies that are under STAR-K supervision, the fish are filleted with a mashgiach present and therefore one may buy any fish fillet without any further concerns.

Skinless Fillet from a Non-Kosher Store or Source

Purchasing skinless fish either from a store that does not have kosher supervision, or that was not sealed in a package bearing a reliable kosher symbol, is not permissible. Star-K does not consider the color of a fish alone, i.e. the red color of salmon, to be a valid *siman kashrus*.

Buying a Whole or Cut Fish from a Non-Kosher Fish Store or Counter

Technically, one may go to a non-kosher fish store, ask for a whole fish with skin/scales intact, ensure that the knives and cutting boards are fully clean, and have them fillet the fish for you while you observe. However, this is not always feasible, particularly if the store is busy or the cutting area is not easily visible. Furthermore, the equipment really does need to be checked to be 100% completely clean, which may not be so feasible either⁴. STAR-K does not recommend consumers purchase fish from a non-kosher store in this manner unless there is no other option. A Rav should be consulted to determine if your situation warrants allowing this. Alternatively, one may buy a whole fish and cut it at home, which would avoid all the above issues.

Buying Commercially Packaged Fish with Skin/Scales Still Attached

Fish that has the skin/scales intact and is sold packaged from a commercial fish company (NOT cut up in the store) may be purchased and used without any concern of non-kosher fish residue.

The reason for this is that commercial fish processors typically produce fish in large quantities on dedicated equipment and therefore there is very little concern of residue.

The STAR-K Kashrus Hotline (410-484-4110) is available to answer any questions consumers may have. We are open Monday through Thursday 9-5 and Friday 9-2. We can also be reached by email at info@star-k.org.

¹ *Vayikra 11:12*

² See *Avoda Zara 39a* and *TShu"ra 118:1*.

³ When the skin is attached, even if the fish has already been descaled, the outline of the scales is usually visible. That is enough to confirm the fish as being kosher.

⁴ Consumers should not negate the possibility and concern of cross-contamination from non-kosher fish on shared equipment, as our mashgichim who work in the fish industry, report this to be a real concern.