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# Kosher, Local, Organic, Oh My!

An exploration of the challenges and possibilities of local kosher meat in  
the Jewish Community of Vermont.

Frances Lasday

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

Environmental Program

University of Vermont

May 2016

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## Abstract

The laws of kashrut delineate the Jewish dietary practice and prohibitions. Certified kosher food is readily found in super markets across the world, despite the fact that Jews account for only .2% of the world's population, and 1.4% of the US population. Processed kosher food is easily accessible in the United States, but kosher meat is scarce in regions where there are smaller Jewish communities such as Vermont. Muslim Americans also face this problem as *halal* meat is hard to find in peripheral communities. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Burlington had a Jewish community that supported several kosher *shochetim*, ritual slaughterers, but as meat processing was centralized in the secular world, kosher meat processing departed from smaller communities. Today there are no *shochtim* in Vermont and the kosher meat available in some grocery stores in the state is shipped in from as far as South and Central America. The Jewish community of Vermont today is estimated to be around 20,000 people. Members of the community have expressed an interest in having meat that is grown and slaughtered locally in accordance with the intention behind Jewish law.

In order to gain an understanding of the possibilities of local kosher meat in Vermont, I interviewed fourteen people from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds representing a range of opinions on alternative kosher meat food ways. I also compiled archival data to provide a clearer understanding of the historical context of kosher food in Vermont. While there seem to be considerable barriers to the prospect of a local sustainable kosher meat in Vermont such as scale, religious difference, and market potential, I found that the local community believes that there are potential models that could be successfully implemented in a manner of different ways. I discussed the challenges and possibilities of these options with lay leaders, community members and experts in the field of sustainable kosher meat. In conclusion, if there was an individual in the community willing to take on this kind of project, there are a few different ways that a local sustainable kosher meat supply could be achieved in Vermont.

Key words: religious food ways, eco-kosher, Jews in Vermont, local meat

## Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking Kit Anderson, my academic advisor and teacher who has been with me through this project from the beginning. Thank you for nudging me in the right direction and keeping me on track. Your passion is inspiring to me and you have continually made me re-excited about this topic. Thank you for our lively tangents, and, for lack of a better phrase, “nerding out” with me.

Thank you to Susan Leff, my off site advisor, for pointing me towards the right direction. You have not only been a constant guide for the “meat” of this project, but also an immense emotional support. You are a well of life advice. Thank you for showing me the beauty and complexity that is the Vermont Jewish community, and working in any community for that matter. Thank you for always letting me vent, and for sharing your laughter and your wisdom.

Thanks to my friends near and far who have heard me talk about this project, and very little else for the past few months. Thanks also for making me do other things. You know who you are and you rock.

Thank you to Sarah and David for being my surrogate parents in Burlington. Thank you for the long Shabbat evenings and for always making me feel at home. You have encouraged this project from the beginning, and it is for you I hope that there can one day be Vermont grown, quality deli meat.

Thank you to my family and all who came before me. Thank you mom, for showing me the power of stories and listening, dad, for instilling an “it depends” ideology deep into my subconscious, and Josh for always keeping things in perspective. Thank you for your overwhelming love and goofiness, for listening to me rant, and for always telling me the things I don’t want, but need, to hear.

And lastly, to the Jewish Communities in Vermont. Thanks for letting me in and sharing your stories, your holidays, your politics, your Shabbat tables, and your mountains.

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## Introduction

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a prominent rabbi and Jewish philosopher in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century known for his work in the civil rights and anti-war movements, wrote the following about prayer:

“Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, falsehoods. The liturgical movement must become a revolutionary movement, seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, the vision.” (Heschel, 1996)

I have heard this quote many times before, but as I was doing my research for this proposal, looking at how religion has the power to influence environmentally responsible behavior, this quote kept popping up over and over again. What does it mean to be part of a religion? To follow the tenants of a faith tradition that has been passed on to you from generation to generation? How do I apply those lessons and texts and traditions to a context very different than the one in which it originated? These are the kinds of questions that I struggle with every day. How do I, as someone whose central identity is Jewish, interact with the world around me for the better, in a way that is in accordance to the religiously and secularly influenced values that I hold?

Judaism is not a religion of withdrawing. Unlike other religions that strive to be disconnected from the physicality of the world, Judaism pushes its people to fully engage with the physical nature of the world we live in, as long as they are doing so for a higher purpose. The tractate, “*Pirkei Avot*”, or “Ethics of our Fathers,” states:

“*Im Ein Kemach , Ein Torah, Veh Im ein Torah, ein Kemach.*” “If there is not bread, there is no Torah, and if there is no Torah, there is no bread.” (Pirke Avot, 3:21)

For the Jewish people, it is imperative to engage in both the spiritual and the physical because we are unable to navigate one without the other. It is interesting to note that within the deepest levels of Jewish thought, metaphors of food are used to explain the ideal connection between ourselves, creation and creator. Being Jewish is a central part of my identity; so is being an environmentalist. Overtime, I have found more and more connections between these identities, most notably in the intersection between the religious, cultural and environmental

impact and the pervasive influence of food. Many of the Jewish holidays, which are inexorably linked with the seasons and harvests, are mandated to take place at certain times of the yearly cycle. Because the Jewish people follow a lunar calendar which does not follow the seasons, every few years we have to add in an extra “leap month” in order for the holidays to stay in the seasons they embody. The Jewish people are so connected with the growing season and agriculture that we have to alter our conception of time around them.

Food can be used as a lens through which to look at the values imbedded within any culture. The food items, the ways the food is cooked, who cooks the food, who grows the food, how the food is eaten, and where the food can be purchased are all determined by the overarching ideals that the society holds. A Jewish table looks different than a Christian table, which looks different in America, than it does in Spain, or India. Food connects all people, in every culture. Everybody must eat to survive, and it is the single most common way that every individual interacts with the natural world on a daily basis. The foods that a culture decides not to eat are just as important as the foods they do eat. When looking at how or why individuals decide to reduce their meat intake, religion acts as a great motivator for meat reduction (De Backer & Hudders, 2014).

Living in Burlington, there are many varied opportunities to encounter locally grown produce and meats. Living here and studying food, I had the opportunity to spend time in City Market and at the Burlington Farmers Market looking at the food for sale through a critical and curious lens. In my observations, I noticed that while there was a large amount of local meat, none of that meat was kosher. At the same time, I spent time in the home of Sarah Kliensky and David Borsykowsky who keep kosher and yearn for the classic Kosher Deli meat that they grew up with in New York that is unavailable to them in Vermont. So, I became curious why the local meat in Vermont did not cater to the religious needs of the Jewish Community, and this project was born.

It would be remiss to not mention the fact that I am a vegetarian, a fact that always got a laugh as I was discussing this project with my interviewees. I stopped eating red meat when I was thirteen, chicken when I was fourteen, and fish when I was nineteen. Now, you are probably thinking to yourself, a vegetarian is writing her entire thesis on making sustainable, kosher meat more accessible? I know, it’s more than a little ironic. However, it is important to mention that



although I am a big believer in vegetarianism, and a staunch advocate for meat reduction in individuals and western societies' diet, I am not opposed to others eating meat if the ethical and environmental ramifications behind an individual's choice are considered. I also understand and respect the custom in Judaism that encourages eating meat on Shabbat and holidays.

Ultimately my reasons for being a vegetarian stem from my deep concern for the impact meat production has on the environment. Through this thesis I have been able to speak with amazing people who think about and struggle with meat eating, and who have dedicated their lives to thinking critically about how they raise animals to eat. They believe, as do I, that our faith tradition has much to offer to the conscious food movement.

Food, particularly meat production, has a large impact on the environmental wellbeing of the ecosystems upon which we are dependent for life. Agriculture today is the third largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions (Reynolds, 2013), and has huge effects on freshwater access, soil degradation, and pesticide pollution. So understanding how, why, and which factors are involved in people's food choices is important to consider when looking at the larger ramifications of food on our climate. I strongly believe that religion has a huge impact on how people make food choices, and since religion can have strong influence on its practitioners, I think that it has the power to change behavior widely across communities for the better.

This study explores the challenges, critiques, and possible ways to create an access point for kosher, local, and sustainable meat in Vermont. In particular, this study looks at the ways in which the Jewish laws of *kashrut*, have influenced the history of Jewish food procurement and behavior in the Vermont Jewish Community. Walking around the farmers market in Burlington, it was apparent to me that local and sustainably raised meat in Vermont is a sought after product. Having spent a little bit of time amongst a crew of Jews who seek out both sustainably raised and kosher meat, I began to wonder why none of the local Vermont meat was kosher, especially as I heard rumblings about the desire for this kind of product from different members of the Vermont Jewish community. This paper is an exploration of how I began to reconcile those questions.

Understanding that meat production has vast environmental implications and that religious values shape environmentally conscious behavior, I went forth on this study through the lenses of religion and ecology and the story of Jewish peoplehood in Vermont. I conducted fourteen interviews with experts in the field, Rabbis, and members of the greater Jewish

community in order to assess the challenges and feasibility of implementing this kind of program in the current context of Vermont's kosher food system. I visited different communities in Vermont, and compiled archival data to provide a clearer understanding of the historical context of kosher food in Vermont. Ultimately, I examined the kosher meat food ways of Vermont as a case study in the challenges and possibilities of religiously motivated small scale meat production.

I found that while there seems to be considerable barriers to the prospect of local sustainable kosher meat in Vermont, the local community believes that there are potential models that could be successfully implemented in a manner of different ways. While they face up against obstacles such as scale, religious difference, and market potential, this resilient and innovative community just might have the *chutzpah* (charming audacity) to make it happen.

## Glossary

*Ashkenazic*- Jews who settled in European countries after being expelled from biblical Israel.

*Chutzpah*- adjective; audacity, nerve, or grit to be able to act in a way that is contrary to commonly held sets of behavior or speech.

*Halaf*- literally “to change,” the name of the knife used in *kosher* ritual slaughter

*Halacha, halachot*- codified law/s in Jewish practice, written down in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the codified Jewish laws.

*Hagadah*- literally “the telling” the book read around the ritual family Passover meal

*Halal*- literally “permitted,” the dietary laws in Islam.

*Haram*- literally “unlawful,” foods that are forbidden for a Muslim.

*Hechsher*- a kosher label placed on food where the production of that food was supervised by a *mashgiach*.

*Kosher, kashrut*- the dietary laws and practice of Judaism.

*Kashering*- the verb for making something *kosher*. Most often used when speaking about the process to take blood out of meat, and the process to making cooking utensils suitable for use to assure the *kosher* status of the food.

*Kehilah*- community, often used when referring to specific small groups of Jewish communities.

*Mashgiach*- an observant Jew knowledgeable enough in the laws of *kashrut* to supervise the slaughter, or production of food that is to be labeled and sold as *kosher*.

*Mishna*- 63 volumes of codified Jewish oral law.

*Mitzvah/ Mitzvot*- biblical commandments, given to the Jewish people, from G!d, written in the *Torah*.

*Parve*- status of food when it is neither dairy nor meat (e.g., fruits and vegetables, eggs, fish, etc.)

*Pirke Avot*- “Ethics of our Fathers”, one of the 63 tractates in the *Mishna*, dedicated to Jewish morals, values, and ethics.

*Shtetl*- Small autonomous Jewish communities in the predominantly non-Jewish, often rural, Eastern Europe environment, in the 18<sup>th</sup> through the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Haumann, 2002).

*Schechet*- the past tense verb used to describe an animal that was ritually slaughtered in accordance to the laws of *kashrut*.

*Sephardic*- Jews who originally immigrated to Spain, Portugal, and then to the Middle East after their exile from biblical Israel.

*Shabbat*- The 25 hour day of rest beginning at sundown Friday night, and ending on Saturday night when 3 stars are seen in the sky. There are many traditional practices that take place during this time, most notably the prohibition against work of any kind.

*Shabbaton*- An event put on by a Jewish group that has different events over a Shabbat.

*Shochet, shochtim* - a person who is trained and performs ritual slaughters in accordance with the laws of *kashrut*.

*Talmud*- the collection of Jewish laws, debated and written down over time, as an authoritative interpretation of the *Torah* and its laws.

*Torah*- the 5 books, in the Jewish tradition, orated by G!d to Moses, presenting G!d's laws to the Jewish people.

*Treif*- “un-kosher” or non-kosher food, any food that goes against any of the laws of *kashrut*.

## Literature Review

### **Introduction to the Literature**

This literature review serves to examine the existing body of knowledge regarding the impact of religion on food choices, the basic rules of kashrut, environmental ethics in Judaism, and the history of kosher food in the United States, and of Vermont Jewry. Looking specifically at the ways in which the Jewish laws of *kashrut* have influenced the history of Jewish food procurement and behavior over time, I intend to provide the context in which Jewish individuals in Vermont make food choices today. This information barely scratches the surface of the depth of the laws described in Jewish texts nor does it get into the debate that has occurred over the past two thousand years about each of those laws. However, I hope that this introduction will enable all who read this to understand the basic vocabulary needed to delve into this topic. I have also included a glossary (found after the Introduction) that defines the terms most commonly used in this paper. By researching the history of the Jewish community in Vermont I hope to provide a specific place based context of the ways that Jews in Vermont have had access to kosher food, specifically kosher meat, over time.

### **Religious Food Ways**

Culture and food have always intersected, and food is often a direct representation of the way people live in and think about the world around them. A statement from “The Energy/Food Crisis: A Challenge to Peace, a Call to Faith” conference in Italy in 1975 stated that the “strongest expression of any religion is the ‘styles of life’ that characterize its believers” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 75). The laws of kashrut or *halal*, or the mindfulness eating practices of Buddhism (Ralph, 2011), or the adherence to strict vegetarianism of Hindu tradition (Sutra, 2001), offer different suggestions of the ways practitioners should behave; they all suggest the “best” or “proper” way to make food choices for themselves and their communities.

As an example, in Islam, there is a strict code of dietary restrictions called “*Halal*.” The restrictions of observance break foods down into two categories, *halal* and *haram*, or “permitted” and “illicit.” In terms of meat, animals must be slaughtered in the proper fashion which consists of using a stainless steel knife, while invoking the name of *Allah*. Pig products and alcohol are strictly forbidden, and the production of any food with these products renders the food haram. Like the practitioners of many different religions, level of strictness that an individual abides by

is often very different on a person to person or family to family basis, with the orthodox holding their food to higher standards than individuals who are less observant and decide to eat foods that are not technically *halal* (Eliasi & Dwyer, 2002; Fischer, 2011).

Taqwa, is an “eco-food” cooperative outside of Chicago, that brings sustainably sourced and ethically raised *halal* meat to the surrounding community. It encourages the community to use daily food practice as a way to promote “a wider interpretation of Islam’s environmental and social relevance” (Robinson, 2014) *Halal* food markets today are massive and on a global scale. With over one billion Muslims in the world today, *halal* food is mixed up in the global market like it never has been before (Fischer, 2011), and the *halal* label can be found on many common processed foods today.

### *Judaism: Kashrut- The Dietary Practice*

*Kashrut* is the set of Jewish dietary laws. The laws are highly specific and have been codified over time in various religious texts, all with origins in the Torah. The most basic practice includes the separation of milk and meat and the prohibition on certain kinds of animals. There have been many reasons given to the potential logic of these rules, including the humane treatment of animals, better health, equitable distribution of resources (Schwartz, 2001), and inherent protection of ecological processes (Levin, Azose, & Anderson, 2014; Arthur Waskow, 1995).

In addition, the idea of keeping kosher is often thought as one way of “negotiating” Jewish identity (Kraemer, 2007). It keeps the Jewish people separate from their non-Jewish neighbors while living in the diaspora, wanting to keep a sense of self and peoplehood through their food choices. In fact, one of the first things that was published to encourage Jewish children to remain attached to their Jewish identities in post-World War II America, was a “Junior Jewish Cook Book” (Gross, 2014). The word “*kadosh*,” used in all contexts of Jewish text, is interpreted as holy or sanctified, but in translation it means separate or apart from. Food, therefore, must also be an expression of that difference (Arthur Waskow, 1995). It has become easier over time to find kosher labeled food in the United States, and throughout the world, which has reshaped the way Jewish identity has related to food over time.

From a more religious and spiritual lens, the laws of *kashrut* fall under a set of *mitzvot*, biblical commandments, called *hukim*. *Hukim* are super-rational, that is beyond logic and

reasoning. So the reason that Jewish people keep kosher is simply because it is what G!d asked of them, and the idea is that a Jew could become closer to G!d by granting this request (Stern 2004).

There is also a prominent thread of thought through religious texts and spiritual writings that it is spiritually detrimental for the Jewish soul to eat non-kosher food, even if unintentionally (Lipschutz, 1988; Stern 2004; Fishkoff, 2010). The common tagline “you are what you eat” often trumpeted by local food activists and nutritionists is found throughout the Jewish commentary about eating practices. The idea is that whatever a person eats gets absorbed into your being, and therefore the difference between being scrupulous about what goes into one’s body or not is the difference between profanity and holiness (Fishkoff, 2010).

All of these reasons and decisions vary person to person, and sect to sect of Judaism; practice is observed on a large spectrum. Keeping kosher is both an individual and community-wide decision, because how a person decides to eat determines the kinds of people willing to eat with them, or in their home (Kramer, 2007; Stern, 2004). Levels of kashrut observance can radically affect people’s food making decisions.

### **The Basic Laws of Kashrut**

The laws of kashrut are vast, the debates are endless, and hundreds of books have been written debating the debates. In Judaism, food falls into three categories, milk, meat, and *parve*. All produce and grains are considered kosher in their raw form. The kosher status of dairy products is determined by the animal that the milk has come from if the animal is kosher as is its milk. Eggs are considered to be *parve*, neither milk nor meat, and can therefore be eaten with both categories of food. Similarly to milk, if a bird is considered kosher, then so are its eggs. (Stern, 2004; Fishkoff, 2010).

Processed foods generally require a *hechsher*, or label indicating that an item is kosher, which can be given by observant Jews who have a specific education in the laws of *kashrut*. The supervisor, or *mashgiach*, is often hired by a community to provide a third party system to prevent corruption or fraud when something is labeled kosher (Stern, 2004; Fishkoff, 2010, Lipschutz, 1988). It is important to note that there are hundreds of *hechshers* in the United States alone, each who hold to a slightly different standard (Harris, 2016). Individuals and communities who keep kosher make decisions on which to trust and use.

To make a vast overgeneralization, laws of kashrut that surround the slaughter and eating of meat can be categorized into three sections; the eating of only permitted animals, kosher ritual slaughter, and the non-mixing of dairy and meat foods.

### *Permitted Animals*

Blood of any animal is never permitted to be eaten. It is seen as the life force of the animal, and it says specifically in the Torah that the consumption of any blood is forbidden.

"אך בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו" "Ech basar be-nefsho damo lo teachlu"

"But, flesh with its soul, its blood, you shall not eat" Genesis 9:4

Once kosher meat is slaughtered, it needs to be salted or brined within a certain amount of time after it has been killed so that all of the blood can be removed from the flesh. When cracking eggs, a kosher baker will crack an egg first into a separate bowl to ensure that there is no blood spot which would render the rest of the ingredients *un-kosher* (Stern, 2004; Fishkoff, 2010).

A list of permitted animals and their qualifications can be found in Leviticus 11:2-3, 27 and in Deuteronomy 14:4-5. As an overview, mammals need to have cleft hooves and must chew their cud in order to be kosher. Birds are significantly harder to identify as kosher because the only thing provided in the Torah is that they must not be one of the species listed as forbidden. However, since these birds are only named and not described, Rabbis do not know what these birds are today. So instead, the only birds that are considered kosher are the ones that have been traditionally eaten and passed down as kosher.

Pigs are often seen as the symbol of ultimate uncleanness. Throughout history, pigs and the forced eating of pork has been used to torture Jews. Many reasons have been put forth over this issue. Why are pigs singled out? Throughout the literature, many ideas of why this is have been presented. One interpretation is that a pig eats everything and anything in its path, and therefore is the antithesis of kashrut, which in theory encourages the Jewish people to be mindful of what is put into their bodies. The pig is also seen as the most hypocritical animal, trying to willingly deceive its masters. It has split hooves but doesn't chew its cud, so while it looks kosher, it is a trickster and a hypocrite, personality traits that would not want to be absorbed by the eater (Stern, 2004, Fishkoff, 2010).



## *Ritual Slaughter*

As previously stated, it is forbidden to eat animal flesh that has been torn off a found carcass or that has died from natural causes. So the only way to eat kosher meat is to slaughter the animal in accordance to the laws of kashrut. There are very specific instructions, generated by rabbinic interpretation of Torah and encoded in the *Shulchan Aruch*, book of codified Jewish law, on the ways that animals can be killed that will make them suitable for Jewish consumption.

“וזההת מבקרך ומצאנך” “Vesahata m’varecha v’mitzvonecha

“And you may slaughter your livestock, as I have commanded you” Deuteronomy 12:1

As it says in the Torah, “you may slaughter, as I have commanded you.” This line is the basis for the importance of ritual slaughter. The Torah is not saying, slaughter the animals however you want. A *shochet* is a learned observant Jew who has been thoroughly trained to *shecht*, ritually slaughter, animals based upon this principle. The *Simlah Chadashah* is a practical manual, written in the 1800s, and condensed all of the rabbi’s arguments into a practical manual from which a *shochet* can learn his trade.

Using a *halaf*, a ritual blade, a *shochet* first checks for the smallest nicks by stroking a fingernail across the blade three times, the blade must be perfectly smooth so as not to tear the flesh of the animal. The word “*halaf*” translates to “change,” the blade is called this because it is the agent that turns a living animal into something that is dead, and permitted to be eaten (Lipschutz, 1988; Stern, 2004).

In the traditional laws of kashrut, there are five factors that are considered when determining if the slaughter was kosher. The cut must be made without hesitation so that the esophagus and the trachea are cut at the same time. Pressure may not be applied when making the cut and the *shochet* needs to make sure that there is no tearing of the flesh and the only severing is done by the sharpness of the blade cutting. The cut must have been made in the correct area of the animals neck described and debated in many Torah commentaries. Lastly, the blade must be able to be seen at all times. Often a sheep will be sheared before it is *shechted*, so that the blade is never hidden by the fur (Lipshutz, 1988, p. 20-21). A *shochet* would be very knowledgeable about the specifics of these laws, including knowing what a correct and an incorrect slaughter looks like. If something goes wrong, then the meat is not kosher, and is sold to non-kosher butchers (Stern, 2004).

In addition to these laws, there is an additional check of the animal for those who keep a stricter form of kashrut. If an animal is to be *hechshured* as “Glatt” kosher, a special *b’dikah*, or examination, is needed to be performed on the lungs of the slaughtered animal. The lungs of a potentially glatt kosher animal need to be checked for adhesions and holes. This is done by removing the lungs from the body of the animal and blowing into them to make sure that there are no “adhesions” or perforations (Lipshutz, 1988, p. 24).

### *The Separation of Milk and Meat*

The prohibition of mixing milk and meat food together is the most well-known aspect of kosher law. The prohibition appears three separate times using the same language throughout the *Torah*:

"לא תבשל גד' בחלב אמו" *“Lo t’vashel gadi b’halav imo”*

“You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”

-Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21

There is a common belief amongst Jewish theology that nothing in the Torah is unintentional or without reason, and therefore *Torah* commentators over time have discussed various reasons for the repetition. The *Talmud*, the compilation of rabbinical debate and decisions on Jewish law, states that the three repetitions represent three different aspects of this rule. Therefore, a Jew may not eat, cook, or derive any benefit from the production of the mixing of meat and milk together (Lipshutz, 1988; Stern 2004, Schwartz, 2001). This radically affects the ways Jewish homes are structured and food is cooked. However, like most things in Judaism, there are varying opinions on the ways to go about applying these rules, and in every sect and in every household there is a large amount of variance. With these prohibitions on mixing comes the necessity to have separate dishes, utensils, and, depending on the specific Jewish practice, separate ovens and sinks. This practice also often includes waiting up to six hours between eating meat and milk food, so the two ingredients do not even mix in a person’s mouth or throat (Stern, 2004).

## **Jewish Food Values**

On top of all the specific laws and regulations surrounding the production and consumption of kosher food, there are also underlying Jewish values that could inform the ways people make food choices. In the Jewish tradition there is a distinction between “normative” Jewish law, and looking towards the ethical conduct, going beyond those laws. This concept referred to as “*lifnim me-shurat ha-din*” or “morality beyond the requirements of the law” is the basis behind the Jewish environmental movement and environmentally and socially conscious Jewish eating (Schwartz, 2001). A major Jewish conception of the humans place in the world is the idea that humans are partners with G!d, tending to the world that G!d created, in an attempt to make the earth a suitable dwelling place for the divine presence. There are many opinions on what this should look like, and how people of the Jewish tradition should go about doing this, but this ethic is present throughout many different strands of Jewish thought. The following are a few examples of such values.

### *Bal Tashchit*

The center of the Jewish environmental ethic comes from a phrase in Deuteronomy (20: 19-20) describing the treatment of fruit trees when besieging a city. It is a biblical commandment that one may not destroy fruit trees, even of the enemy in times of war. From this comes the interpretation that if in an extreme case of war one may not fell a fruit tree, they may not destroy the tree in a time of peace either (Neril, 2012). From this phrase comes the expression “bal taschit” or “do not waste.”

While there is lots of wiggle room to determine what “needless waste” entails, modern day interpretations by Jewish environmental activists have used this term to compel the Jewish community to do everything from installing solar panels on their community centers to reducing the numbers of plastic cups that are used at Jewish summer camps.

Richard Schwartz makes the argument in his book “*Judaism and Vegetarianism*” (2001) that animal centered diets are extremely wasteful, and meat consumption should be severely limited because it wastes so much water and food resources that could be going to feed other people (Schwartz, 2001).

### *Humane treatment of Animals*

There are many laws in the Torah that directly relate to commandments that highlight the humane treatment of animals. These wider ideas stating that one must feed their animals before they feed themselves (Deuteronomy 11:15, Talmud, Berachus 40a), how pack animals may only be tethered to a cart with animals of their own size, and the details of kosher slaughter which attempt to cause the animal the least amount of harm. Many animal rights activists and vegetarian advocates have argued, that factory farming, and the ways conventional meat production happens today is not only inhumane, but goes against the values and laws described in both the Torah and its commentaries. As with many situations in human behavior and faith traditions, there seems to be a disconnect between the choices an individual makes and their values and beliefs. Schwartz (2001) writes that “Jews who eat meat raised under such conditions seem to be supporting a system contrary to basic Jewish principles and obligations” (p. 39). While this is a fringe view, many activist organizations such as the Jewish Vegetarian Association of North America use this argument repeatedly to convince the rest of the Jewish community that the ways factory farming is done now goes against core Jewish commandments (JVNA, 2015).

Dr. Temple Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University famous for her work in the livestock industry, specializes in creating protocol houses and best practices for humane slaughter houses. Dr. Grandin has done research on both *schitah* and *halal* ritual slaughter where pre-stunning the animal is not permitted. Grandin’s research notes that since ritual slaughter is exempt from the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act of 1978, “some plants use cruel methods of restraint, such as suspending a conscious animal by a chain wrapped around one hind limb” (Grandin, 1994). In theory this would go against other Jewish values of humane treatment of animals, but in most industrialized kosher meat processing, the treatment of the animal does not impact the kosher designation of the meat. Grandin has done work to address this cruel practice and has been instrumental in designing an “upright restraint unit” that allows the animals to be calm before they are slaughtered, a factor which, according to Grandin, allows them to “lose sensibility and collapse more quickly than cattle with visible signs of agitation” which is how Grandin measures the efficacy of humane slaughter (Grandin, 1994).

## *Jewish Vegetarianism?*

Like most things in Judaism, the thoughts surrounding Jewish values driven vegetarianism are varied. While some say that the worldly status of animals can only be elevated when they are used to fuel humans who can then enact good in the world, a small group of scholars, Rabbis and activists believe that the Jewish people were meant to be vegetarians, and only through concession to our human weakness did G!d allow Noah and his family to begin to eat meat once they exited the ark after the flood (Waskow, 1995; Schwartz, 2001).

In Fishkoff's "*Kosher Nation*" she spends a time writing about the modern Jewish Food movement and observed the educational shechting of a few goats with the Adamah Farm program at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in 2007. She remarks that "few of these students actually eat meat" (Fishkoff, 2010), yet they were still willing to learn about the process and tradition of *schitah*, and many will choose to eat meat when they know from where it comes from. This debate to eat, or not eat meat, seems to echo the shifting trend in the environmental movement in general. Transitioning from a strong emphasis on vegetarianism after the publishing of *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971 by Frances Moore Lappe, the environmental movement of today has made room in its psyche for "purchasing only sustainably raised livestock" (Kamin, 2013). There is also a tradition in Judaism that posits eating meat is the best way to celebrate Shabbat and holidays. While there do not seem to be any laws stating that one must eat meat to properly celebrate the holiday, the tradition to do so is strong throughout the Jewish community (Kalechofsky, 2001).

## **The History of Kosher Food in America**

### *European Shtetl to American Free Market*

The Jewish communities of Europe in the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds frequently remained separate from the larger rural towns and cities across the continent. These *shtetls* were governed through a *kehilah*, or community, based system which controlled religious lives and livelihoods within the community (Fishkoff, 2010). The *kehilah* served many functions, notably hiring and overseeing the *shochtim* (kosher ritual slaughters) to ensure high standards of kosher observance. In order to do this, the job was broken into two distinct jobs of *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and butcher (meat processor), a distinction which remains in Jewish law today. The distinction creates a fiscal separation between the *shochet* and the butcher. This

reduces the potential of corruption because the *shochet* is paid regardless of the kosher status of the slaughter. In addition, since the *kehilah* had a monopoly on producing kosher meat in their respective, detached communities, if a *shochet* was found to be corrupt he was unable to continue to work in that community and was essentially excommunicated. These factors enabled the system to ensure that all meat that was sold as kosher, was actually kosher (Gastwirt, 1974).

The first Jews who immigrated to the United States settled in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, soon to be renamed New York under English rule in 1654. However, the community, made up of *Sephardic* Jews, mostly from Spain and Portugal, did not establish a synagogue until the 1700s and did not have a rabbi until the middle of the 1800s. The community, Shearith Israel, was the only congregation in New York City until 1825 (Lytton, 2013). While the *kehilah* system of kosher regulation was quite strong in the shtetls of Europe through the nineteenth century, the new wave of *Ashkenazi* Jewish immigrants who arrived from Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, found a large range of Jewish observance and a whole new set of American values to contend with.

In true American style, this decentralization led to a new phenomenon - “the independent *shochet*” (Lytton, 2013). The first example of this was when Jacob Abrahams was dismissed from his post as *shochet* for the Sharaith Israel community in 1813, and decided to continue slaughtering kosher meat anyway. He then sold it to butchers who had not been previously approved by the congregation, dismantling the monopoly previously held by the congregation. By 1915 there were 1.4 million Jews in New York City (Lytton, 2013). The power that small community brought to the regulation of kosher food in the old world *shtetls* became irrelevant to the masses of immigrants who came to American at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Leaving behind the shtetl communal structure, in favor of what Lytton (2013) described as the “liberal, democratic, pluralist, sprawling free market” (p. 34) of America proved to be too much for the old ways of central regulation to be effective in early twentieth century Jewish America. Due to the independent *shochet*, Jews in America no longer needed to be part of a Jewish community to acquire kosher meat, or to make any other religious decision for that matter. In New York City, the numbers of synagogues expanded from twenty in 1865 to over 826 congregations in 1918, each with their own set of rules and regulations (Lytton, 2013). Therefore the monopoly required for communal control over regulation disintegrated.

While large cities had no problem meeting the economic demand of supporting a *shochet*, smaller communities spread across the country had to be more creative in the ways that they procured their kosher meat. Before World War II, although many small communities had larger percentages of Jews who observed the traditional rules of *kashrut* and were anxious to have kosher meat, the demand for kosher meat was still limited due to the size of the community. Therefore, in order to employ a *shochet* for the community, “those able to practice *schitah* were inclined to serve their communities in other capacities as well” (Weissback, 2005). In some communities the local *shochet* would have other responsibilities and jobs to support himself and his family. However, in communities where a *shochet* could not support himself, “unconventional arrangements” were devised by the community to either bring in kosher meat from the closest big city or to work with the local non-Jewish butcher shops (Weissback, 2005).

The kosher beef business was incredibly lucrative as butchers and processors were able to sell kosher meat for a higher price, in order to cover the cost of the *shochet*, and often the additional supervision of a *mashgiach*, a Jew learned enough in the laws of *kashrut* to be able to watch over the processing of the meat once it had been slaughtered. In the *kehilah* system, a *shochet*'s salary was paid by the congregation who employed him (Gastwirt, 1974); in the free market of America, taxes were placed on the kosher meat since butchers had to pay the *shochet* themselves. The added profit brought in with kosher meat was amplified by the fact that in early 1900s, 156 million pounds of kosher meat was bought in New York City per year. However, it is estimated that 65% of the meat sold through kosher butchers was not kosher. Since kosher meat could be sold at a much higher price than its non-kosher counterpart, rampant corruption ensued, and it was even rumored that in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian mafia had “penetrated the industry” after giving a loan to a butcher, and then deciding to stay in the industry because the payoff was so high (Fishkoff, 2010).

### *The Modern Kosher Food Industry*

As previously stated, the kosher processed food industry has drastically increased the number of products being supervised that are being made in factories in large scale. This growth in number of products successfully certified is, in large part, due to the growth of the industrial food system in general. When thousands of units of a product are being made at a time, a kosher label becomes a value added to the product as the rate of production far outweighs the price of

the certification (Lytton, 2013). Although there are many *hechshers* (kosher labels), the market has been mostly dominated by the “Big 4” agencies which are Orthodox Union (OU), Organized Kashrus Laboratories (OK), Kof-K Supervision Organization, and Star- K Kosher Certification (Lytton, 2013; Fishkoff, 2011; Stern, 2004). The power and trustworthiness of these labels comes from both the competition that they have with each other and the reputation they obtain from their clients (Lytton, 2013). While the “Big 4” dominate, today there are over 600 certification agencies, including many small companies that may only have a single rabbi that certifies only local restaurants and products (Stern, 2004).

Figure 1. Figure 1: The “Big Four” Kosher *hechsher* agencies. OU, OK, Kof-k, and Star-K shown from left to right.



It is important to note that the kosher labels of today do not take into account questions of environmental or social merit of their products, and look strictly at the *halachic* stipulations when certifying products. However, there are some exceptions. Earth-K strives to certify products as both organic and *kosher* (Earth-K, 2015). *Magen Tzedek*, a *hechsher* from the conservative movement of Judaism, looks at labor practice as well as kosher law to give their *hechsher* (Magen Tzedek, 2015). In addition, the “big 4” companies will revoke their kosher label from corporations and products that are found guilty of breaking US Department of Labor, Environmental Protection Agency or United States Department of Agriculture laws (Lytton, 2013).

Figure 2. Figure 2: Earth- K label



Figure 3: Magen Tzedek Label





Before 2008, 60% of kosher beef and 40% of kosher poultry in the United States was sourced from the Agriprocessors meat processing plant in Postville, Iowa. The corporation was estimated to sell \$250 million worth of meat per year. Agriprocessors was the first processing company to take on all aspects of the kosher meat process (slaughtering, soaking, and salting) in addition to packaging for sale, all under its own supervision. This enabled them to sell the packaged product to local grocery stores all over the country rather than to butchers, which significantly lowered the costs for consumers. On May 12, 2008, all of that came crashing down when a massive raid by the US Department of Labor found hundreds of undocumented, underpaid, workers. This raid, in addition to the 2004 and 2006 allegations of animal abuse from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA, 2004, 2007, 2008) created a downward spiraling of the corporation into bankruptcy and launched an unprecedented nationwide debate over the ethics of kosher practice across all sects of Jewish practice (Fishkoff 2010, Lytton 2013).

While the orthodox communities still believe that animal, labor and environmental abuses should be left to the United States Department of Agriculture or the Environmental Protection Agencies, and posit that kosher labeling should not be dependent on these concerns, this scandal began to shift the focus in other, more liberal sects of Judaism. Many are now asking the questions of how to incorporate ethical practices into kosher certifications (Arthur Waskow, 1995). One example of this is Uri L'tzedek, an orthodox social justice organization, which is "taking back the word kosher." Rabbi Yanklowitz, the spokesrabbi for the organization, recently explained their push to create more transparent certification systems. He emphasized that they are not "telling agencies what their standards should be" but are encouraging agencies to put together ethics policies and systems to enforce those policies (Dreyfus, 2016).

Today, the kosher food market is a \$12 billion industry. However, only 8% of those who look for foods with a kosher label are religious Jews (Lytton, 2013). In his book "Kosher" Timothy Lytton offers that many people other than religious Jews look for kosher certification when making their food choices as a response to "a more general cultural anxiety of about industrialization of the food supply." Many individuals today look for kosher certification because of lactose intolerance or vegetarianism (Picard, 2009), but more are driven by the idea that kosher certification means that a nice rabbi "motivated by a deep religious commitment to

the ritual purity of food” (Lytton, 2013) is actively overseeing their food. Many find this reassuring, despite the fact that they have no idea what that process actually entails.

Over time, more and more large corporations employed kosher certification agencies, notably Oreo’s, which became kosher in 1997 (Lytton, 2014), and Maxwell House Coffee. Maxwell House Coffee even published a Passover *Hagadah* under their name to market their coffee to the Jewish population (Fishkoff, 2010). A *hagadah* is a ritual book read from each Passover that describes the story and traditions of Passover. The Maxwell House Hagadah pictured below is from 1936, and copyrighted to General Foods Corporation. This particular copy was found on the third floor of my grandmother’s house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

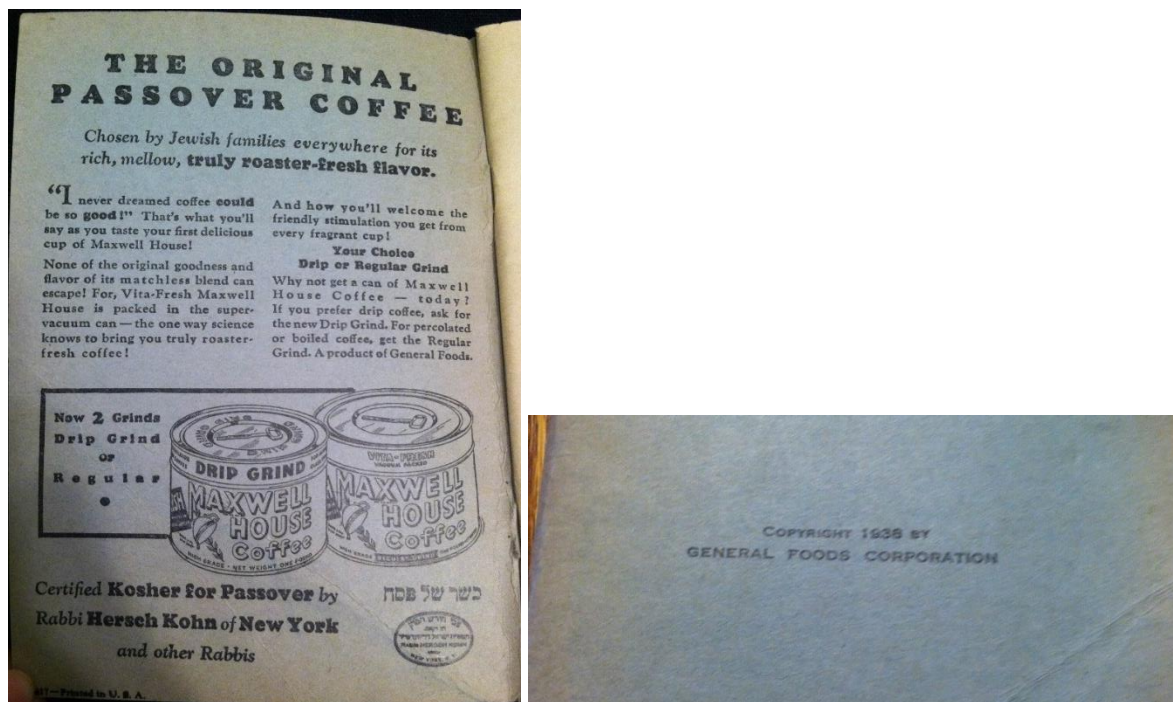


Figure 4: Maxwell House Coffee Hagadah 1936

There have also been many interesting examples of Jewish owned kosher companies advertising to the larger public. In 2011, Manischewitz, a kosher food company best known for their kosher wine and Passover goods such as *matzah* and macaroons, began their campaign to reach out into the general market. While keeping their kosher status, they drastically changed their advertising to be more welcoming to non- Jewish consumers (Newman, 2011). This phenomenon is not new. The popular advertisement “You don’t have to be Jewish to love

Levy's Rye" covered New York subways through the 1960s and 70s, and as a result the Jewish-owned Levy's bread company greatly increased its sales (Fox, 2014).

### *The Jewish Environmental and Food Movement*

"For thousands of years the Jewish people has believed that eating matters. *Really* matters: to history, society, the earth, the Cosmos- even G!d." Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *Down to Earth Judaism* (p. 16)

The term "eco- kosher" was coined by Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of renewal Judaism, "sometime in the seventies" (Schachter-Shalomi, 1993). Similar to the ways in which American Jewry was highly involved with civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1950s and 60s, and 70s, the Jewish community has been heavily involved in the environmental movement. Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a student of Reb Zalman's, is the preeminent scholar on the ideas of eco- kashrut. According to Waskow, the eco- kashrut ideal was meant to answer three main challenges; to discover a Jewish way of eating that helps, rather than harms the planet, to lessen the barriers that prevent people from eating together, and to find ways to eat which strengthen the Jewish community (Waskow, 1995 p. 143).

In his 1991 essay, "What is Eco-Kosher," Waskow (1991) questions the *kosher*-ness of a tomato that has been doused in chemical pesticides and picked by an underpaid, abused laborer. In a traditional *kashrut* framework, all produce, no matter how it is grown, is *kosher* when it is raw. The tomato could only become un-*kosher* if it was then processed to be made into a different food item (e.g.; tomato sauce or ketchup) using other non-*kosher* food items or processed on machines that also process non-*kosher* food. If, instead, the tomato was looked at through an eco-*kashrut* lens, an individual trying to determine if said tomato was *kosher* would have to use a much larger framework.

This approach deals with the challenges of dichotomies found in traditional practices. In traditional *kashrut*, an observant person simply has to look at whether something is *treyf* or not. For this qualification there are very specific laws and descriptions dictating what and what not to eat. The difference with eco-kashrut, is that it focuses more on the ways in which values rather than laws shape the ways in which the individual decides to observe. Therefore, the *kosher*/not *kosher* status of the food would be potentially different for different people (Arthur Waskow, 1991).

Interestingly, much of the literature about the Jewish environmental movement, which has been growing exponentially since the late 1980s, has come from the wide array of educational resources developed for the wider Jewish population. This broad curriculum deals with both the increasingly dire need to heal the planet and the inherent values within Judaism that allows those changes to be made as a Jewish people (Passow, 2010). Similar to the way that the “Junior Jewish Cookbook” was used post- World War II era to engage young Jews in their Jewish identity, the growing Jewish environmental movement of today engages a typically unengaged assimilated Jewish demographic. Waskow (1995) points out that often, the Jewish individual is forced to choose between Jewish traditional practice and fighting for the causes they believe in. He believes that eco-kashrut is the alternative that will allow the Jewish person to do both (Waskow, 1995).

Although it is only a very small fraction of the kosher meat sold in America, in recent years there has been the emergence of Kosher, organic and free range meat sellers. Companies such as KOL Foods, Grow and Behold, and Just Good Kosher all make great strides to sell their kosher, organic, cage free, and ethically raised meats at premium prices from their online platforms or through their community connections (Hanau, 2012). These companies have largely stemmed out of the Jewish Environmental movement with many thirty-somethings running it having come out of immersive Jewish environmental educational experiences (Fishkoff, 2010).

### **The Jewish Community of Vermont**

The oldest record of Jewish settlement in Vermont dates back to the founding of the East Poultney community in 1867 (Schine, 2008), but there are records of land grants that were given to people who were believed to be Jewish in 1763, in the Pocom, now Bristol area when Vermont was still a colony. In addition, Jewish names started popping up, scattered throughout the burgeoning Vermont communities in the mid-1800s (Samuelson, 1976).

It is estimated that Jews first began congregating in Vermont as they worked as peddlers through all of New England in the 1820s (Schine, 2008). At that time it was the European Jews who became “pack peddlers,” carrying and selling goods in sacks on their backs, walking from place to place, that ended up leaving the cities to which they had originally immigrated, and moving into more rural areas. The Poultney economic boom began around the 1840s as a result

of the opening of its slate quarries. The growth the town made it a natural stop for Jewish peddlers on their way up and down to Plattsburgh, New York, where there had already been a strong Jewish settlement since 1840 (Schine, 2008). According to the “Jewish American Year Book” there were 1,000 Jews living in Vermont in 1899 (Jewish Publication Society of America, 2014). While that number has fluctuated greatly over time, as of 2012, there are an estimated 5,989 Jews living in Vermont (Sheskin, 2013).

### *“Little Jerusalem”*

In the late 1800s, Burlington became a bustling city, which rapidly expanded into the largest lumber port in the northeast due to the expansion of the rail road and access to resources. Because of the expansion, Burlington became an attractive place for Jewish settlement (Vermont PBS, 2014). In 1900 there were 98 documented working Jews including one Rabbi and two Hebrew teachers, increasing greatly from the 35 documented in 1890. By 1930 there were six butchers processing kosher meat, and an estimated 200 Jewish households (Bercuvitz, 1994). There is no published data after 1940 about the current day occupations of Jews living in Burlington. Ohavi Zedek, one of the oldest synagogues in the northeast, was established in 1885. OZ was originally housed on Archibald Street, and was the first physical synagogue in Vermont. The building was completed in 1887. The original building is still located on 168 Archibald Street, and is now the home of the Ahaveth Gereim Congregation, a very small orthodox community. In 1952, Ohavi Zedek, now the largest congregation in Vermont, moved to its current home at 188 North Prospect Street (US Register of Historic Places, 2008).

### *Jewish Vermont Today*

Although there is no exact count of the Jewish population in Vermont today, Susan Leff, the director of the organization Jewish Communities of Vermont estimates that there are around 2,400 families that belong to synagogues, and an estimated 20,000 Jews in the state. Some of these communities are over 100 years old, and many have Hebrew schools with varying class sizes (Jewish Communities of Vermont, 2015). Like all diverse communities it is impossible to generalize anything about the Vermont Jewish community, and not much has been written about the community since the 1970s. A major part of this study is historical research about the Jewish community.

## Methodology

### **Goals and Objectives**

In order to better understand the current potential for local kosher meat, that is also held to community decided ethical standards, I needed to understand the historical and cultural context of access to kosher meat through Vermont's history. The Jewish community of Vermont, is a microcosm of the diversity of Jewish life present throughout the United States. Through learning about the history of kosher meat in Vermont, I was also able to gain insight into the community structures of Jewish life in the past and present. One of my major goals for this project was to speak with older members of the Burlington Jewish community who grew up in Burlington's "Little Jerusalem" in the Old North End. It was through those conversations and archival research that I was able to paint a picture of the food ways model of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish community.

My main goal for this project was to explore potential models in which a kosher sustainable meat presence could happen in Vermont. In order to do this, I came across different challenges that would need to be addressed should a community member choose in the future to take up this kind of project. By looking at the current kosher meat food ways through a religious and ecological lens, I was able to get a comprehensive view of which factors impact the potential success of this kind of project. Through these lenses, it became clear that looking at both the religious and environmental ethics would be critical to creating a market for this kind of product, and that navigating the diverse and unique religious backgrounds of the communities throughout the state would be as much of a challenge as other issues such as scale and environmental regulations.

### **Working with Jewish Communities of Vermont**

This year, I have had the privilege of working with the organization Jewish Communities of Vermont (JCVT). Serving as a way to connect all the different Jewish communities and events across the state, JCVT works to "provide communications and connections, facilitating state-wide programs and activities, and educational resources and services among the diverse and dispersed, organized and independent Jewish groups in Vermont" (Jewish Communities of Vermont, 2016). There are many things that define the Jewish experience that are specific to Vermont. Susan Leff, Executive Director of JCVT and my advisor, often discusses the

implications of Jewish Vermont as a peripheral community. Since the community is so small, it has unique challenges. Members have come up with unique solutions to some of those problems, an ethic that Susan calls “the Vermont way.” It is through this lens that I was able to frame my research, and in addition to “Jewish Geography,” establish a network of people to speak with about this topic.

**Jewish Geography: A community approach to networking**

In the Jewish world, whenever one meets a new Jewish person, the first thing one does is engage in what is colloquially called “Jewish Geography.” You start by asking a person where they are from, if they went to Jewish sleepaway camp, or were involved in some kind of Jewish youth movement. The ultimate goal is to find out which people the two of you, inevitably, have in common. As the Jewish population is so small, it is more than likely to find multiple people in common. At the beginning of my research, I joked that this was one of the ways that I decided I would find people to interview for my thesis. But as my research progressed, I was alarmed at how true that joke became.

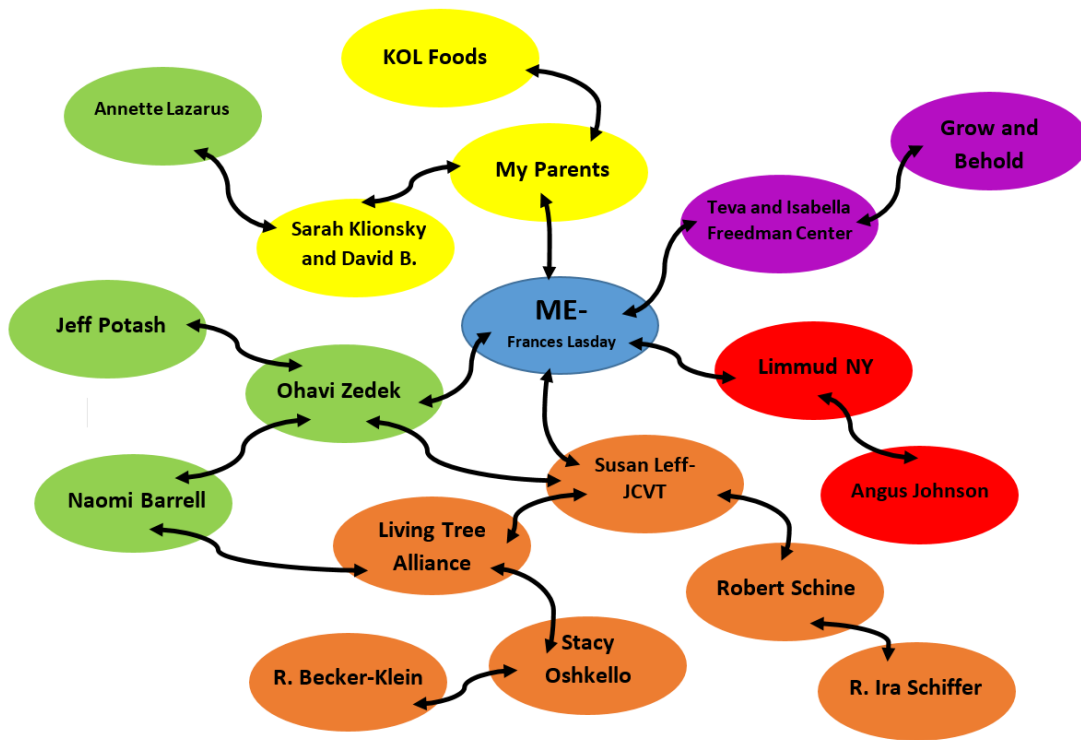


Figure 5: Jewish Geography Network

If the overall American Jewish population is small, the Vermont Jewish community is tiny. I was particularly fortunate to be working with Susan Leff from Jewish Communities of Vermont. Not only is Susan a wealth of knowledge herself, but having access to the official network of Jewish Vermont was invaluable. In almost every interview, I was referred to speak with someone else in the Jewish community. This ended up being my primary method in finding people to interview and to hear which perspectives were important for this community to consider. In order to demonstrate how vital this process was to my project, I have added the map above to demonstrate this network.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
<b>Naomi Barrell</b>	Principle, Ohavi Zedek Hebrew School, 90 Students, Largest Congregation in VT	February 18, 2015
<b>Anna Hanau</b>	Owner, Grow & Behold, OU Certified, Glatt Kosher, Pasture Raised Meats	November 11, 2015
<b>Devorah Kimmelman-Block</b>	Owner, KOL Foods, 100% Grass Fed, Glatt Kosher Meats, Star-K Certified	November 25, 2015
<b>Yisroel Jacobs</b>	Vermont Kosher, Catering Company, supplies all kosher food to UVM	February 1, 2016
<b>Robert Schine</b>	Professor of Religion, Professor of Jewish Studies, Middlebury College	February 2, 2016
<b>Kathy Guevera</b>	Head Chef, Mashgichah, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington	February 4, 2016



<b>Rabbi Ira Schiffer</b>	Rabbi, Chaplain, Middlebury College	February 10, 2016
<b>Stacy Oshkello</b>	Founder and Resident, Living Tree Alliance	February 11, 2016, Site visit February 19, 2016
<b>Naf Hanau</b>	Owner, Grow & Behold, Limmud NY Conference	February 12, 2016, February 14, 2016
<b>Rabbi Jan Salzman</b>	Assistant Rabbi, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington	February 24, 2016
<b>Joe Regenstein</b>	Cornell Kosher and Halal Meat Initiative, Cornell University	February 26, 2016
<b>Angus Johnson</b>	Owner, Just Good Kosher, Sustainable meats grown on pasture, “Kashrut with Kavanah”	March 8, 2016
<b>Jeff Potash</b>	Local Historian, Member Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Grew up in Burlington	March 9, 2010
<b>Annette Lazarus</b>	Grew up in “Little Jerusalem” in Burlington, South Burlington Resident	March 10, 2016

Figure 6: List of Interviewees and their Affiliations

### Interviews Process

Devorah Kimmelman- Block is owner of KOL Foods, a company that sells 100% Grass Fed Organic Meats, and ships them all over the country. She is based out of Maryland, and as a Mom, wanted to find a kosher meat that she could feel good about giving her kids. I first spoke with *KOL Foods* and *Grow and Behold* as two organizations who are already offering kosher sustainable meat. Anna and Naf Hanau own *Grow and Behold* selling Kosher Pastured Meats, and pride themselves on being able to speak both “Farmer” and “Rabbi.” They run *Grow and Behold* out of Brooklyn, New York and, like *KOL Foods*, ship their meats to all fifty states. I wanted to speak with them first because they are the leaders in the field of kosher and sustainable

meat products. Through phone interviews, I was able to ask them about their model, how and why they decided to get into this kind of business, and began to be able to feel out the kinds of questions that I would need to ask future interviewees to determine the logistics and ethics of this type of business.

My interviews were mostly narrative-based. Although I took the time to write out a series of interview questions before speaking with each person, I very rarely stuck to them. I wrote those questions based on information I found out about the individual either online or from the person who referred them. I strongly believe that each person had something unique to contribute and that their life narrative was as useful to me as the things that they had to say about my topic specifically. So I went into each interview, eager to hear not only their opinion on this topic, but also to hear their story. After all, I found that who they are very much informs why they think the way they do. This issue is personal and based on some kind of spiritual understanding of the world, therefore my interview questions and the interaction that I had with each person was unique. Then, the answers to the questions that I asked in one interview, informed the questions that I asked the next person. The answers I received slowly shaped the ways I interpreted the responses I got from other interviewees.

Knowing that this topic is so personal, and noting that the Jewish community in Vermont is so small and close knit, I took particular precaution when quoting and identifying members of the community, especially when describing their personal kashrut practices, or opinion of the kashrut practices of others. While I had a set conversation to ask my interviewees their consent before being recorded and always asked if it was OK to quote them, I made special arrangements with many of the people I interviewed for particular security and comfort. I wanted to be sure that this work did not and does not represent anybody in a way that they do not wish to be represented.

While most ethnography deals with the observation and analysis of someone else's culture, this project would fall under the category of "auto-ethnography," a technique defined by the researcher's "prior knowledge of the people, their culture and language, as well as the ability to be accepted to some degree, or to "pass" as a native member" (Hayano, 1979). I strongly identify and see the world through a Jewish framework because I myself grew up within Jewish community, faith, and family in Rockville, Maryland, a community starkly different than the

Jewish community in Vermont. I have been so grateful to the Vermont Jewish community in its many forms for letting me into its world for my time going to school and living in Vermont. Many of the people mentioned in this paper have welcomed me into their homes or have invited me over for holiday meals, starting well before I began work on this project. Knowing the subjects on such an intimate level has given me certain advantages in understanding the subtle politics of this community in particular. With this knowledge I was able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. That being said, I also had to be particularly careful during my coding and writing process to be aware of what biases I might have, since I have become so heavily invested in this community.

### *Main Sources*

The following is a description of the main interviewees that come up in the results and discussion sections of this project.

Anna and Naf Hanau own Grow and Behold, a company that sells “Kosher Pasture Meats.” Anna and Naf met at Adamah’s Jewish farming program and originally set out to be vegetable farmers at which time Naf decided that he wanted to learn to become a *shochet*. After the Agriprocessors scandal in 2008, they “saw a need for this kind of meat.” They run Grow and Behold out of Brooklyn, New York.

Naomi Barrell is the principle of Ohavi Zedek Synagogue in Burlington, Vermont. Ohavi Zedek (OZ), is the largest synagogue in the state, and the Hebrew school has approximately 90 students annually. Naomi and her partner Jade live on and maintain a homestead in Bristol Vermont where they raise chickens for eggs and meat, in addition to goats, sheep, a guard llama and many cats.

Stacy Oshkello is part of an organization called Living Tree Alliance that has recently broken ground on the land that they just bought in Moretown, Vermont. Living Tree Alliance aims to be an “ecological village... where family, nature and evolving spiritual traditions flourish” (Living Tree Alliance). In addition to interviewing Stacy on the phone for 45 minutes, I was able to walk part of the 93 acres of land that Living Tree Alliance will one day soon call home. Living Tree Alliance hopes to be home to six families and in addition to living and working on the land as farmers, they also hope to do outreach and educational programming surrounding Jewish agricultural traditions.

Rabbi Jan Salzman is the Assistant Rabbi at OZ. She and her husband Loredo Sola have been raising their neighbor's cows for quite some time and have often thought about and spoken with other the members of the community about the potential for "groovy" Vermont raised kosher meat.

Rabbi Ira Schiffer has been the Associate Chaplain/Rabbi at Middlebury College since 2001. In addition to being a Rabbi ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, Schiffer also has his Master's degree in the History of Judaism from Brown University. Rabbi Schiffer is also the Director of Education at the Havurah (cooperative Jewish community) in Addison County. Rabbi Schiffer took the time to thoughtfully share with me both his personal meat and kashrut practices in addition to his eloquent vision for potential models that could be created for local kosher and intentional meat supply across the state.

Professor Joe Regenstein is the director of the Cornell Kosher and Halal Food Initiative, out of Cornell University. The goal of this initiative is to help the food industry provide kosher and halal products worldwide- including underserved smaller communities in rural parts of the country. Professor Regenstein has worked closely with Dr. Temple Grandin in her research on the ethics of kosher and halal slaughter and to develop a system to hold the animals to be slaughtered so they experience the least amount of stress beforehand.

Angus Johnson, owns Just Good Kosher, a small kosher poultry company out of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Just Good Kosher tagline is "kosher with kavanah" and Johnson hopes to expand his market to Vermont based slaughter houses.

### **Coding Methods**

After spending hours transcribing each interview, I worked out a coding method which would allow me to group what people said into general categories. The interviews lasted anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. Because this topic is so individualized and my questions varied so much from conversation to conversation, I was amazed to see how many themes overlapped. As I went through my interviews, I began to notice patterns which I compiled by code word into a single document. I then drew from each of my interviews pieces that fit into each of those topics, refining my code words, and adding and subtracting categories as I went through my interviews. The result of that document was that I was able to clearly see

which topics interviewees spoke about more than others. I was then able to weave what my interviewees said about each major topic into my results.

### **Historical Research**

To illustrate the history of kosher meat in Vermont, I did primary archival research, to compliment the interviews I conducted. In order to do this, I reached out to Jeff Potash a local historian of the Jewish community in Burlington. He pointed me to the 1926 Burlington City Archives, located in the Special Collections section of the UVM Baily Howe Library. I also looked into the *Historic Guide to Burlington Neighborhoods, Volume 3*, to find more information regarding the area of north Burlington that used to be “Little Jerusalem” and the history of Rosenberg’s market, the wholesale kosher meat market in Burlington from 1908 to around 1951(Blow, 2003). I compiled my information about Reverend Nadelson who served the Ohavi Zedek community as *shochet* and cantor, from multiple sources, the first and most important from a personal interview with Annette Lazarus, Nadelson’s daughter as well as from articles written about the history and culture of Little Jerusalem. Both Potash and Lazarus sent me articles from the Burlington Free Press from their personal research and collections.

From the beginning I knew that I was interested in looking into the history of Jewish Vermont. Through the lens of kosher meat, I hope that I was able to add to the historical discourse on the cultural and religious heritage of Jewish Burlington. For the history section of my results, I wove together the archival research from city directories, historical records of buildings, and articles from the Burlington Free Press with the information I gleaned from interviews that I conducted.

### **Glossary and Translations**

One of the things that was the most frustrating for me to do in the writing process was the constant need to translate ritual terms from Hebrew to English. In most cases, I had to take complex Jewish thought which is colloquially simply expressed by one or two Hebrew words, and then translate and explain that word in English. This paper has become an exercise in communicating complex ideas as much as anything else. Because I am writing this paper for an academic as well as a highly secularized community, I have tried to make a comprehensive glossary of terms to ease understanding, while at the same time reducing the amount of time

needed to define each word. The Glossary can be found after the introduction at the beginning of the paper.

There is a tradition in Judaism not to write out G!d's name on paper, so that if discarded, or put on the ground, one does not desecrate G!d's name. This is done many ways in Jewish papers and writing, the most common being "G-d" with a capitalized "G" and a dash replacing the "o." It is my personal practice to replace the dash with an exclamation point, used as a positive emphasis of the word on paper. This is a practice that I first saw in the sourcebook "Food for Thought; Hazon's Sourcebook on Jews, Food, and Contemporary Life," and really liked it, so I adopted it as a personal practice. This is how I refer to G!d throughout this paper.

### **Survey Methods**

Half of the surveys I conducted in person at the Sukkot on the Farm community event in Fall of 2015. I sat at the entrance table, and asked attendees to answer the survey as they came into the festival. I gathered the second half of the data from sending out the survey to online platforms such as the Jewish Communities of Vermont weekly newsletter and to specific Rabbis who volunteered to put out the survey on their communities weekly newsletter. I received a total of 29 survey responses. This low mass of responses does not allow me to make any generalizations about the community of Vermont, but it did provide insight into some of the behavior surrounding kosher meat consumption in this Jewish community. See the Survey Questions in Appendix A.

## Results

Throughout this project, I kept in mind the question; what is preventing kosher meat from being raised and slaughtered locally in sustainably in Vermont. Through the analysis of the interviews I conducted I will describe the history of kosher meat procurement in Vermont and discuss where kosher meat is available today. After describing the past and present of kosher meat in Vermont, I will go into the foreseeable challenges and potential that the interviewees see in finding a way to have local kosher meat in the current landscape. Finally, I will describe five situations in which individuals or companies are taking charge of their own meat supply in Vermont today.

### **Kosher Meat in Vermont**

With the changing makeup of the Jewish community over time, the ability for the community to support local kosher meat processing has ebbed and flowed. In the 1800s through the 1960s, Vermont had kosher meat that was slaughtered in Vermont. Today, based on survey data, individuals who wish to purchase kosher meat in Vermont procure it from out of state.

#### *Historical Context: Kosher Meat in Vermont 1800s to late 1960s*

The Rosenberg Family are noted for their “importance in the early history of the Burlington Jewish Community” by local historian Myron Samuelson, author of *The Story of the Jewish Community of Burlington, Vermont*. He postulates, that it was by their encouragement that Reverend Yeheskiel Mowskowitz stayed in Burlington in 1883 and where he “operated a general store, meat market and ice house” (Samuelson, 1976). Samuelson’s record of Reverend Mowskowitz is the earliest record I found of a *shochet* in the Burlington community. Mowskowitz served as *shochet* and *chazzan*, or cantor, until he left Burlington in 1923. According to the Historical Guide to Burlington Neighborhoods, the Rosenberg meat and grocery market was first housed at 323 North Winooski Avenue when Isaac Rosenberg first appeared in the city directory “as a peddler” in 1901. However, the market first appears at its permanent location at 217 North Avenue in 1908, and appears to remain a kosher meat and grocery until 1951 when the building is marked vacant in city directories (Blow, 2003).

Annette Lazarus lived with her family at 269 North Winooski Avenue in the height of when that region was referred to as “Little Jerusalem.” As she welcomed me into her South

Burlington apartment, she took out a picture (shown below) of her parents sitting in front of her house at 269 North Winooski Avenue in Burlington.



Figure 7: Reverend Nadelson and his wife, sitting in front of their backyard where R. Nadelson *schechted* chickens (unknown date, c.a 1950s).

She remembers how her father Reverend Morris Nadelson, who was officially appointed as the *shochet* for the Ohavi Zedek community in 1937 (Burlington Free Press, 1964), used to slaughter chickens in their backyard. Members of the community would bring live chickens to her father's shop in the backyard and leave with their kosher slaughtered chickens. In this time, it was still common place for the kosher processing, consisting of de- feathering, soaking and salting, to be done at home, most often by the women in the household, and she has memories of her own mother doing so. Lazarus's parents came to America from Europe, and met and got married in New York, where she was born. The family moved up to Burlington because her father had a sister who was already living here. Lazarus explained that her father was "well-liked by everyone", a feat, she commented, which was not very common with all of the usual synagogue politics. She remembers that she used to beg her father to go with him when he went outside of Burlington to farms in the surrounding areas to slaughter bigger animals, but since Lazarus really like animals, she was quite upset once she saw the way it was done, and laments that she probably "should not have gone." Lazarus explains that back in that time, there were a lot more people who kept kosher around, also that her family ate a lot of kosher meat, since her father was the *shochet*.





Larger *halaf*, used to slaughter larger mammals.



Smaller *halaf*, used to slaughter chickens

Figure 8: Moriss Nadelson's *halafim*, ritual slaughter knives. From the Ohavi Zedek Archives, donated by his daughter, Annette Lazarus

Jeff Potash, historian and member of Ohavi Zedek grew up in Burlington, and still lives here today. His mother did not keep a kosher home, but whenever his grandmother, who did keep kosher, came into town, they had to have kosher meat in the house. So, he can remember going to one of the two the kosher butcher shop on Archibald Street at the time, stating that it was like “going to the old world.” From when he was a young boy, he remembers the kosher butcher shops in the 1950s as a “decrepit and disgusting place with all the animals hung up” in what was basically a glorified garage (Potash, p.c. s, 2016).

It appears that by the 1960s, the last kosher butchers and slaughterhouses had left Vermont. When Yisroel Jacobs moved with his family to South Royalton, Vermont in 1966 his father bought, and took over, a bankrupt kosher poultry processing plant, and began operation as a non-kosher poultry facility. He remembers that their first house, located on the same property, came with Mezuzahs on the doorposts; “obviously it had last been home to the *Shochtim* that stayed, in shifts, in S. Royalton to do their work.” Based on this piece of evidence, and the

speculation of other historians in this field, this seems that by the late 1960s to have been the last time there was kosher meat slaughtered in Vermont.

In more recent history, kosher meat has been available in the local grocery stores. I have also heard anecdotes in the community about George Solomon, a man who used to travel to Montreal and bring back trunk large quantities of fresh kosher meat in his trunk. These stories were the first that I heard of alternative ways that the Jewish community procured meat when it was no longer readily available through the state. Solomon is said to have been quite a character, all of the stories I heard of him were told with a laugh and a smile. Although he passed away sometime in the middle 2000s, he lives on in his legacy in the service that he provided for the Jewish community, particularly in Burlington.

### *Kosher Meat in Vermont Today*

Today, the Price Chopper on Shelburne Road sells both fresh and frozen packaged Empire Kosher brand chicken, as well as frozen red meats and other kinds of processed kosher meats, while the Price Chopper in Morrisville only sells frozen meats. Based on the survey



Figure 9: Sign in window at the Price Chopper on Shelburne Road.

results, and anecdotal conversations within the Jewish Community, it seems that kosher poultry is more readily available in Vermont than other kinds of meat. That being said, it is clear from the conversations I had with Vermont residents and from the results of my survey that the Vermont Jewish community has additional ways of procuring their meat.

Several people mentioned in the survey that they get their kosher meat from other cities such as the Costco in Montreal, the Trader Joe's in Albany, or from the Boston area when they go down for a visit. Others bring it up from New York or New Jersey. One individual even indicated that he buys kosher meat from either Grow and Behold or KOL Foods, having it shipped from the companies' processors to them in Vermont. Most notably, the Chabad community in Burlington brings big coolers of frozen, *Glatt* Kosher meat up from their "*hasidische*" butcher shops in Brooklyn or down from religious neighborhoods in Montreal where the meat is killed and supervised by orthodox Jews under a *hechsher* that they trust.

There are also no kosher restaurants in Vermont, and you cannot buy prepared kosher meals. The notable exception to this is Vermont Kosher, LLC, located on Redstone Campus at the University of Vermont. Out of its kosher kitchen at Simpson Hall, dinner is served Sunday through Thursday evenings and is open to anyone, not just UVM students. Vermont Kosher also produces “ToGo” meals six days a week and made available at six locations on the UVM campus.

Vermont Kosher holds its meats to not one, but three different sources of third party kosher supervision, or *hechshers*. According to Yisroel Jacobs, it has an OU label, a “hasidische crown heights” *hechsher*, and a third *hechsher* in accordance with the Sephardic tradition. Vermont Kosher food itself carries a certification from the Chabad Lubavitch of Vermont, certified by the local Chabad Rabbi Yitzhak Raskin, and is not only Glatt Kosher, but also certified that no work is done on Shabbat for the preparation of the food, and is “pas yisroel” which means that an observant Jew is the person to turn on the stove (Raskin, 2016).

Vermont Kosher gets all of its grass-fed beef from New York, receiving frozen shipments on pallets delivered via tractor trailer directly to their dock at Simpson Dining. Jacobs explained that while their chicken is from the US, the kosher beef market depends heavily on imported products; much of the beef comes from South America where more temperate climate makes it easier to find *Glatt* suitable cattle. In order for meat to be considered “*Glatt kosher*” a specialized inspector called a *bodek*, must check the lungs to be sure there are no deformities that would render the meat not kosher. The Kosher exporter would normally “take over a plant for a certain amount of time” and to do kosher slaughter for that fixed time. The hind quarters are then sold back to the secular market as part of the business relationship. The kosher product is then shipped frozen in containers for surface shipment back to Israel, North America, or other Jewish population centers around the world.

#### *Current Interest in Kosher Meat*

In my survey data, 40% of participants indicated that they keep kosher. However, this survey (See Appendix A) does not seem to be representative of the Jewish population in Vermont. Half of my data was collected in person at a community holiday event in the fall of 2015. Out of those surveys, only two participants indicated that they keep kosher. In stark contrast, all participants that responded to the survey online indicated that they keep kosher.

Therefore it appears that the only people who would be interested in answering this kind of survey already keep kosher and are at least marginally invested in that practice. This skews the data in a way that does not allow me to guess the amount of people who keep kosher in the state. However, what this data clearly shows is where people are buying kosher meat.

Once I decided to only use the data as a way to see where it is possible to purchase kosher meat, I took the data from recipients who had indicated “yes” to the question “do you keep kosher” and looked at their responses to “if you eat meat, where do you buy it?” Based on the results of my survey, and conversations with various members of the Jewish community, kosher meat is currently available in a few grocery stores across Vermont; the Price Chopper on Shelburne Road, Trader Joes in South Burlington, and the Price Chopper in Morrisville, Shaws on Shelburne Road, and Costco.

It is important to note that the relative population of people who keep kosher in Vermont is very small, and while there is no comprehensive data about specific numbers. In speaking with Rabbi’s and other active members of the Jewish community, it seems to be a consensus that Jews in Vermont, generally, do not engage with kashrut in their daily lives. Rabbi Schiffer mentioned he believes that “there may be individuals in his community that are more strictly kosher,” but he doesn’t think that “there are more than half a dozen families” in his Middlebury community. Although there are pockets of more religiously observant communities throughout the state, by Rabbi Jan’s assessment, “unless you are talking about Chabad” the population of people who care about kashrut by any measure is very small in the state. Johnson of Just Good Kosher echoes this sentiment, stating that although Vermont is a “great place to raise products” it is not necessarily “the best place to try to promote a market for kosher meat” because it is a “really, really small market.”

However, from this survey one could see that an individual’s kosher “status,” does not indicate their willingness or desire to buy a product like this. The second thing that the survey was able to tell me, is that, despite the varying styles of kosher observance, almost everyone indicated that they might be interested in this kind of product. This makes me think that if this market were to be set up in Vermont it would not need to rely on just the people who have made kashrut a part of their lifestyle. In addition, the fact that stores like Price Chopper and Trader

Joes are willing to stock and sell kosher meat is an indicator that there is already a market for kosher products in the state.

## **Local Kosher Meat**

### *Demand for Local Kosher Meat*

There is kosher meat available in Vermont. So, when discussing the potential or relevance of a local sustainable kosher meat market in Vermont, it is impossible not to address the reasons for wanting to move away from the modern kosher meat industry. From the small selection of people I spoke to within the Vermont Jewish community, it became clear that there is some level of dissatisfaction with the current kinds of kosher meat being offered in the local stores, evident by the fact that so many on my survey indicated that they go elsewhere for their kosher meat. Based on this data I cannot say for certain why the survey participants decided to look elsewhere for kosher meat. However, based on the rest of the interviews I had with community members, lay leaders, and experts in the field I believe that many community members take issue with the way in which the meat currently being offered got from farm to table.

I started my research by speaking with Grow and Behold and KOL Foods, established companies that are already selling “sustainable” kosher meat in a semi-alternative market, who emphasized the importance of ethical treatments of animals and workers came up, in addition to the impacts that raising meat has on the environment. As Naf Hanau explained, and as I explored heavily in my literature review, the history of industrialized kosher meat reflects the trend of industrialization and factorization of the secular meat market. Hanau states that “there is an expectation for meat to be cheap in this country” and there is not an exception for kosher meat. In kosher meat, Hanau speaks from experience, the input costs of growing the animals, are not as expensive as the kosher processing costs. Those costs are what generally makes kosher meat around double the price of non-kosher meat in the industrial system (Hanau, Limmud NY sessions). Despite its extra cost, kosher meat coming out of the industrial market is not objectively more ethical than the secular market.

For Johnson, and Just Good Kosher, this means that the rules of not burdening the beast, nor tripping the blind “also apply to [him] in the production of kosher meat.” For the meat to be considered kosher by his standards, all the way through the time that it gets to the plate of the

consumer, the animal must be taken care of, his workers must be treated decently “get paid when they are supposed to, according to Jewish law.” And it means that he is going to “take care of the ground that was G'd has given to [him], to be a steward” (Johnson, p.c. 2016). He believes that if not all of this is fulfilled “then we have null and voided the very essence of the kavanah [intention] of kashrut.”

Because of their work to uphold both the halachic tradition in addition to the social and environmental intentionality that so many have come to see as integral to an alternative kashrut system, Grow and Behold and Just Good Kosher can successfully maneuver both the religious and less observant Jewish worlds. Johnson states that he is blessed to be able to “walk in the Hasid community and walk in the reform or renewal community, and still feel comfortable and not have my *hechsher* questioned, or [his] integrity or [his] kavanah [intention].”

### *Challenges and Opportunities of Vermont*

In contrast to the community of “Little Jerusalem” in Burlington in the 1940s, no kosher meat is raised, slaughtered, or processed in Vermont today. Scale and religious difference came up with every person I interviewed for this project as challenges that would need to be overcome in order for this kind of product to be possible in the state.

#### *Scale*

Whenever I spoke with someone who would be considered a professional in the field of kosher sustainable meat, or in the kosher industry in general (ie; Grow and Behold, Joe Regenstein from the Cornell Initiative on *Halal* and Kosher Food, KOL Foods, etc), they told me that creating a local sustainable meat option would be nearly impossible or extremely challenging in Vermont mostly because of the scale of the market.

According to Anna Hanau, owner of Grow and Behold, kosher slaughter is very hard to do on a small scale because of the special equipment and infrastructure that is required for the processing of meat. One of the more expensive units of infrastructure are the Temple Grandin designed restraining unit discussed in the literature. Joe Regenstein, head of the Cornell Kosher and *Halal* Food Initiative, expressed that there are issues that one might run into on top of the USDA and State regulations of meat processing. He explains that there “is an incredible up-front investment” required to get this kind of structure up and off of the ground, which he says is a

“discouragement” for many small communities. In general he describes small scale kosher as being “very complicated and very expensive” (Regenstein, p.c., 2016).

The other issue that comes with scale and lack of critical mass of a Jewish population, is the fact that there is not a *halachicaly* observant *shochet* in the Jewish community of Vermont. A large part of the cost of kosher slaughter is bringing in the *shochet*, whom, as Regenstein explained, often has to stay for up two days to supervise all the processing and deveining. However, that does not mean that if the community were to factor in the cost of bringing up a *shochet*, as some of my interviewees have suggested that this barrier could not be overcome.

Johnson puts it as “unfortunately, the farther we move away from... highly observant or even a conservative group of people” the less kashrut becomes a part of daily life. Which, by default, means a smaller market for kosher meat. This also creates a situation where even if there were people interested in sustainable kashrut in an area, the community is not large enough, and does not have enough resources to be appealing for a religiously observant *shochet* to live in that place. This makes the process more expensive if the community decides to hold by traditional standards of kashrut. Bringing up a *shochet* is expensive, which brings us back to a question of the economies of scale, which as already discussed, could be navigated in different ways. This issue comes with the assumption that having a traditionally observant *shochet* is what the Jewish community needs or wants.

It is important to note that just because the “obvious market” (Leff, p.c., 2016) of individuals who engage with kashrut in traditional ways seems too small to be able to support a local kosher meat market, it does not mean that a solution could not be created that is supported by a wider community. As seen in the survey results, even the individuals who indicated that they did not keep kosher, still listed that they might be interested in this kind of product. Susan Leff, director of Jewish Communities of Vermont, strongly believes that community members would be motivated to support this kind of meat with or without a personal commitment to traditional kosher practice.

The issue of scale is also a matter of framing. If the community decides that the scale of market only applies to the relatively small community in the state of Vermont, then the market model would be very different than if the scale of the market included larger Jewish communities in the northeast. As, Rabbi Salzman explains, once you find someone who is willing to set up

the marketing and business in Montreal, Boston, or even Albany, “then you start having the opportunity to create the business model.”

In some cases, small scale is also perceived as an advantage. Johnson addressed the fact that just because it is a “really, really, small market...it doesn’t mean it can’t be done.” In his plan to work with current Vermont slaughter houses he would work with a “*mashgiach* and a *shochet* at a custom slaughter house and do a very small scale kosher meat production.” Johnson explicitly states that he does not think that kosher food should be produced on the “mega ag” level. It should be produced locally and sustainably. Rabbi Schiffer emphasizes Johnson’s notion, stating that he would make the assumption that producing meat on a smaller scale would be part of what “makes traditional kashrut an ethical alternative to corporate slaughter.” He posits that when a *shochet* is killing hundreds of animals a day, “even if [they] are fulfilling the ritual commandments, it’s harder to maintain that ethical underpinning.”

#### *Differences in Kashrut Observance across the Community*

Like all Jewish institutions all over the world, synagogues have to make decisions as a community to decide the practices of kashrut in their kitchens. At Ohavi Zedek (OZ), a synagogue affiliated with the Conservative movement of Judaism in Burlington, they choose to keep their kosher kitchen to a standard “to which anybody, except the most observant, could eat in [their] kitchen.” In speaking with Rabbi Salzman, it is clear that that choice is to make all in the community feel comfortable and welcome. All items coming into the kitchen must have a *hechsher*, and Kathy Guevera, the non-Jewish head chef, serves as the *mashgiach*, which makes her, as Rabbi Jan puts it, “probably the only non-Jewish *mashgiach* on the planet.” Guevara also caters at Temple Sinai, a Reform movement affiliated synagogue in South Burlington. She claims that Temple Sinai “doesn’t have to have a *hechsher*” on the food that they bring into their kitchen, but are supposed to be more kosher style, and can therefore bring food in from outside sources as well, “which makes it a little easier” for Guevara when she cooks there.

Different synagogues across the state have different practices about what is and isn’t acceptable in terms of kashrut for their community. An interesting example of compromise in this issue is from the Jewish Community of Greater Stowe, lovingly called JCOGS. Upon visiting JCOGS, I found that they have a three kitchen system. A kosher meat kitchen, a kosher dairy kitchen, and a third kitchen for items that would not be considered kosher by individuals



who keep strict kashrut. This third kitchen is used most often when the synagogue has potluck amongst its congregants, or when staff members bring in their lunches from home.

Various Jewish communities in Vermont have found ways to hold to their understandings of kashrut, and the limits that living in a peripheral Jewish community places on them. Individuals also need to look at these issues, and families in Vermont have come up with different ways of keeping this tradition relevant, meaningful and practical in their lives.

Rabbi Ira Schiffer, the chaplain at Middlebury College, and his wife Linda, have always kept a kosher home, but when they moved to Vermont, they found “as real carnivores, the lack of access of kosher meat in Vermont was a challenge.” So although they were able to maintain two sets of dishes, one for milk and one for meat, and buy “kosher poultry since that was readily available,” they decided to eat “kosher cuts of meat”, from the parts of the animal that are considered kosher, even though the meat was not slaughtered in a kosher way. He stated, that he is “aware of other families who have sort of gone that same route” and who choose to keep their homes in a kosher style similar to their own.

Although from an orthodox perspective, as Naf Hanau of Grow and Behold Food described, “everyone has the obligation... anyone could do it.” The orthodox practice of today is to hold by the tradition of third party rabbinic supervision, and would therefore not accept *schitah* done by anyone not trained in the halachic practices described in the Simlah Chadasha, a text where the practicalities of the *halacha* of *schitah* are outlined and condensed from the text of the Talmud. This includes the importance of the religious behavior and personality of the *shochet* himself. Anna Hanau, owner of Grow and Behold, empathizes with the do-it-yourself ethic of the Jewish environmental communities that she has been a part of, but really emphasized to me as we were speaking the importance of valuing the specific training that a *shochet* needs to go through (Hanau, p.c. , 2015).

In stark contrast to this belief are the suggestions outlined by both Stacy Oshkello of Living Tree Alliances and Rabbi Ira Schiffer. Rabbi Schiffer explains a situation in which a friend of his “performs *schitah* on locally raised chickens and turkeys from a congregant” in his congregation in Delaware. However this Rabbi does not live an “orthodox lifestyle” and therefore his meat would not be considered kosher by the orthodox community. So Rabbi Schiffer postulates that “if [he] were to learn *schitah* and do schetching it wouldn’t be recognized

by a more orthodox community because [he does not] live an orthodox lifestyle.” However, he believes that this is something that would be valuable to the Jewish community in Vermont as something that is “reasonably kosher by people who aren’t, let’s say, shomer Shabbat orthodox but would like that sort of intentionality to their meat supply.”

### **Examples of Individual Kosher Meat Supply**

While every family has to make decisions about the kosher practices within their household and each has different reasons for choosing to buy different kinds of kosher or not kosher meat, there have been a few examples families in Vermont and elsewhere that have taken the responsibility of bringing kosher meat to their homes and communities into their own hands. Each example combines the ethical issues with their conceptualizations of how to engage with kashrut.

#### *Grow and Behold and KOL Foods*

Grow and Behold prides itself in holding to both the highest religious and environmentally responsible standards in the production of their meats. Naf Hanau co-owns Grow and Behold with his wife Anna Hanau and operates out of Brooklyn, New York. Hanau explained in a conference session that if an animal is to be considered kosher in accordance with the *halacha* of *schitah*, a *shochet* must be G!d fearing, possess good judgment and an ability to learn Torah, be Shomer Shabbat, and to not grow faint at the sight of blood. This last argument, has traditionally been the reasoning given for the barring of women from being *shochtot* (feminine plural of *shochet*). It is important to note, that even though Hanau subscribes to the orthodox halachic understandings of kashrut, he does not quite fit the mold of the traditional *shochet*. As a modern orthodox Jew, he states that “most *shochtim* don’t look like me,” and that he had a very hard time finding an orthodox rabbi that was willing to teach him how to be a *shochet*. The issues of kashrut, are incredibly nuanced, and although Hanau is a certified *shochet* by an orthodox rabbi, he cannot work in plants because Hassidic Jews won’t eat his meat, since the typical Hasidic standard would not accept someone like him as a *shochet*.

One survey participant mentioned that they buy their meat from Grow and Bold or KOL Foods, and have this product shipped up to them in Hardwick, Vermont. Both of these companies sell kosher sustainable meat in the northeast, and ship their products all over the United States. I spoke with both Grow and Behold and KOL Foods during my initial interview

process. While having distinct business plans and niche markets based on location, Grow and Behold and KOL Foods essentially have the same model. Both companies bring together all the pieces of operation together that are required of a meat market. Having the unique skill of what Anna Hannau from Grow and Behold describes as being able to “speak both farmer and Jewish.” Both companies sell and send their meat across the country to all 50 states. KOL Foods is certified by Star-K while Grow and Behold is certified by OU.

### *Naomi Barrell’s Homestead Chickens*

Naomi Barrell, the principle at Ohavi Zedek Hebrew School in Burlington, keeps a kosher home and has stated that it is important for her to do so. Naomi and her family live on land in Charlotte, Vermont where they raise chickens, goats, and a guard llama. Since, they were raising chickens for eggs, they already had the infrastructure to raise a few more chickens. Most years, Naomi, and her wife Jade, raise around 30 chickens and drive them down in their van to the David-Elliot kosher poultry processing plant in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She noted, that based on what she has seen of the plant, she believes that the workers, who were mostly speaking Spanish at her visit, are treated well. The chickens grow for six to seven weeks in the summer, out in the pasture of Barrell’s homestead. Any longer than that, and they grow so big that their legs begin to break, a condition that Barrell points out, is both inhumane and would render the chickens not-kosher.

One year the Barrell family also raised kosher turkeys, in addition to their chickens. They raised five but only two survived from the flock. It was impractical to drive all the way to Pennsylvania for only two turkeys. Instead, they ended up consulting with Hazon, a Jewish Environmental organization that focuses on food justice and the alternative food movement. Hazon was able to set them up with another small group and a Rabbi who was *schechting* Turkeys in Binghamton, New York. In the end the Barell family only raised turkeys once because the process was not cost efficient to only end up with two turkeys and still have to make the drive somewhere to have them shechted.

Barrell said that they began doing this because they wanted “kosher organic free range chickens” and after doing the math, they realized that it would be cheaper to do it themselves than to buy the kosher organic meat that is on the market. Barrell keeps a kosher home and states that it has been important for her to do so since she lived in Israel when she was seventeen.

For her, the practice of Shabbat is all about the kosher chicken soup, and this was a way for her to put kosher chicken that she felt good about on her table. Interestingly, Barrell was a vegetarian for a long time, and was “really worried the first time” that they took the chickens down. Ultimately, she says that “they taste really good.”

Interestingly, the rabbi who shechted Barrell’s poultry, Rabbi Shalom Kantor of Binghamton, is known for doing this sort of educational small scale shechting operations. He was specifically mentioned by Rabbi Schiffer and a few other interviewees throughout my research. In his demonstrations, the people who participate take the meat home at the end. This could be another interesting possibility for Vermont, if a few families wanted to get together for an educational experience and walk away with kosher meat at the end.

### *Living Tree Alliance*

Stacy Oshkello is part of an organization called Living Tree Alliance, which, as a community, just bought “ninety-three acres of land in Moretown, Vermont on prime agricultural soil.” Living Tree Alliance is at the beginning stages of creating a “multifaceted” Jewish intentional living community centered “around Judaism and following the rhythms of Jewish life together” (Oshkello, p.c., 2016). This community will eventually house seven families and have a working lands program in addition to educational outreach programming centering on the connections between Judaism and the land. I was fortunate enough to spend some time with Stacy Oshkello on the land that they just purchased. In addition to spending an hour walking through the snow on their property, I got to meet their sheep.



Figure 10: Jacob Sheep, The Oshkello's Sheep in their temporary lodging while the Living Tree Alliance builds their community.

Stacy and her husband Craig have been raising and shechting their own sheep for thirteen years while living in New Hampshire. They currently raise “Jacob’s sheep” an heirloom variety of sheep that are often fabled to have descended from the biblical flock (Jacob Sheep Breeder’s Association, 2009) which Jacob tended as his dowry to marry Rachel but then being force to work for another seven years after first being tricked to marry Leah (Genesis 28). This nod to Torah stories is one example of how the Oshkello’s and Living Tree Alliance hopes to live and teach about the rich agricultural tradition of Judaism. However, Stacy did mention that she is thinking about switching breeds noting that Jacob’s sheep are smaller than other species and therefore do not produce as much meat.

As Oshkello mentioned, Craig Oshkello is “not a trained shecht, but he learned about shechting with Rabbi Micha Becker Klein.” Rabbi Becker-Klien is a Reconstructionist rabbi in New Hampshire, who has been helping the Oshkello’s shecht their own sheep and chickens. Rabbi Becker-Klein emphasizes that “raising and slaughtering animals for food must be undertaken in the context of all our values” (Becker-Klein, 2010). Oshkello explains that Rabbi Becker-Klein is “a proponent for supporting the small farmer” and about the importance of knowing “your famer and their ethics and their modalities” when you choose kosher meat. This

argument follows the kehilah model of kosher supervision popular in the shtetls of Europe, because they “didn’t have OU” or other large certification agencies. The kosher supervision was determined by the community.

This model exemplifies the kind of intentionality and the creation of unique community standards that could be replicated on a small scale for the Jewish community of Vermont. Creating that community standard is important to Oshkello, but she acknowledges that this meat is “certainly not certified kosher” and would want to be “up front” with anyone for whom they were growing meat. She says that her husband, Craig, jokes that “if it is good enough for my wife, then it must be OK.”

#### *Rabbi Jan Salzman and her husband Loredo Sola*

Rabbi Jan Salzman, the assistant Rabbi at Ohavi Zedek Synagoge in Burlington, and her husband Loredo Sola have been raising their neighbor’s cows for “a long time now.” In the most recent season, Sola decided to see if there would be a local market for this kind of beef. So, he and his partner “kept one cow back from this crop of cows and took it over to a USDA certified butcher shop over in Royalton, VT.” Then Sola began the arduous process of trying to sell it. As Rabbi Salzman describes it, they have been “kind of drug-dealer selling it” out of the parking lot to people interested in their “groovy” beef.

The thing that Rabbi Salzman most emphasized during our conversation was how many “little moving parts” there are to creating this kind of business and marketing model. She said that “Loredo was lamenting that this was actually hard work” coordinating sales, meeting people in parking lots and carrying around coolers of frozen cow. Rabbi Salzman added that they have “often talked about kosher organic meat.” The key, she believes, is that Vermont is located between Boston and Montreal, “population centers that care about organic and kosher.” She assesses that if someone could set up a market that pools the Boston and Montreal interest in what “groovy” meat, it might be feasible if someone could master all of the logistics.

According to Rabbi Salzman, the marketing aspect of this system would be the greatest challenge in setting up some kind of system. Like the models of Grow and Behold and KOL Foods, Vermont is in need of someone to bring all of the pieces of producing, *shechting*, and marketing together. Exclaiming that they “could grow all the cows you could possibly want in North Pomfard, Vermon,” she believes that it is simply a matter of creating a business model and

having someone be in charge of the whole thing. Standing behind the fact that she does not believe that there is enough of a market in Vermont for this kind of meat, she believes that the best way to make this happen would be to create a niche market in the Boston and Montreal kosher markets, selling to those interested in what she calls “groovy kosher” meat. This would allow the Jewish community of Vermont to get over its market scale issue. The next step would be to find an individual willing to take on this project, perhaps even with this research to guide them.

### *Just Good Kosher*

Angus Johnson, owner of Just Good Kosher, a small kosher poultry operation in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, an hour within the Vermont border, converted to Judaism later in life. He found that “Jewish mitzvot, or commandments, follow very closely with [his] own ideology and beliefs especially [in regards to] agriculture and the environment.” As a new convert, he found that as he was in “the process of wanting to keep a tight kosher home” he found it particularly difficult because, in his opinion, what he “saw was a food source that was terrible, probably worse than the secular food source.” He says this about kosher food in the United States today;

“It’s hard to get good food for the Jewish community, anywhere in the country that’s produced locally. It’s always raised and shipped for the most part, on a ‘mega ag’ business model, and that’s not what I’m about. And I don’t think that kashrut should be that way.”- Angus Johnson

So for Johnson, the solution to this problem existed in his own backyard. He had come from “five generations of farmers” so he “started to take a look at the possibility of producing kosher products in the meat market.” He currently brings his animals to slaughterhouses in the New York and Pennsylvania area, but has recently been “working on trying to acquire a couple of slaughterhouses in Vermont that have been willing to go into [kosher] production.” Although wanting to keep the specifics to himself due to the highly competitive nature of the kosher meat market, he states that he has found “some people willing to do this.”

## Discussion

### **Consequences of Living on the Periphery**

Vermont is a relatively small Jewish community. In larger communities, such as Boston or New York City, large concentrations and populations of Jews allows for many and varied Jewish programs and diversity of life. As a result, these urban centers often have many different kosher restaurants and butcher shops because the community is large enough to support them. This is clearly not the case in Vermont which is very much on the periphery of larger Jewish communities. So while Vermont has access to the meat from Boston, Montreal, Albany or New York City, this small community would not be able to support a kosher butcher in the same way as the larger centers.

Back in the 1940s when there was local *schitah* in Burlington, Reverend Nadelson was not only the *shochet*, he was also the cantor for the synagogue. As discussed in my literature, Weissbach (2005) describes the life styles and arrangement of *shochtim* in small communities pre-World War II. Historically in small Jewish communities, learned people would provide more than one service to the community in order to make a living, however with the centralization of meat processing (both kosher and not) and the advent of refrigeration over the last century, this practice became less and less common.

In Burlington's "Little Jerusalem" this was very much the case as Reverend Nadelson supported his family by acting as a *shochet* and cantor for the community. However in today's Vermont, Rabbi Schiffer postulates that kind of support could not be achieved. The only place that would have a viable "support community for that kind of traditional person is the Burlington area" (Schiffer, p.c., 2016). Although the Jewish community of Vermont is largely secular, there are religious Jews who live in the state. There are Chabad communities in Burlington and Rutland, and though they are small, they provide religious services for the entire local area.

Another pitfall of being part of a peripheral Jewish community is that there are few choices for religious community. Leff puts it that "Jews do not move to Vermont to be Jewish," and that often membership to a synagogue is based on location rather than choice of denomination (Leff, p.c, 2015). For context, Leff estimates that in Vermont there is a synagogue every thirty to fifty miles, but in my hometown in Maryland there are at least three different synagogues of different denominations, plus a Chabad community center, within a five mile



radius of my house. Therefore in this community scale not only impacts the market or the amount of meat that could be sold or produced, but it also limits the possibility for diversity in religious expression.

One of the clear challenges of having kosher meat on a local level in Vermont would be deciding on the religious observances the community would need. A major schism that exists for many that I spoke to is not in the validity of different religious practices (although it remains a concern), but rather the apparent loss of the intentionality of kashrut in the industrial kosher meat market. In both the *halachically* observant and non-observant cases it was clear that the ethics, or lack thereof, in the industrialized kosher meat seemed to inform the actions of many of my interviewees.

However, as the old adage goes; two Jews, three opinions. Even among the relatively small population of people in Vermont who do keep kosher in a traditional sense, there is a wide range of opinions of what requirements are needed to call something kosher in the first place. Jewish religious observance is a spectrum, and while each individual holds to their own opinions and practices, it is possible to categorize all the people that I spoke with into two major categories delineated by the role of *halacha* and rabbinic supervision.

Being part of a peripheral Jewish community is both a challenge and an opportunity. Leff, talks lovingly of the ways in which this community comes up with solutions to its problems. Since Vermont is on the peripheries, its communities depend on each other more than in other places. In large Jewish population centers, individual communities are strong enough to put on events, host their own youth groups, and make their own kashrut decisions, independent of the other synagogues and communities nearby. However, in Vermont there are frequent community wide events which encourages Jews in Vermont to collaborate on projects. I am by no means suggesting that this is done with ease as from what I have seen the community constantly struggles with pluralism and group politics. However, because they are so small these challenges are more easily recognized and addressed despite the politics and personalities.

#### *Recent shifts in the Vermont Jewish Community*

The Jewish Community of Vermont appears to be in an incredible moment of change and growth. Ohavi Zedek, the largest synagogue in the state just hired Rabbi Amy Small to take the place of Rabbi Joshua Chasen who recently retired after 25 years. Soon Temple Sinai in South

Burlington will also be hiring a new rabbi. The Jewish Community of Greater Stowe is growing rapidly, adding 28 member families in the past year and more than doubling the size of their Hebrew school (Kuhnert, 2016). The Living Tree Alliance broke ground this spring and host two successful community wide events each year, Sukkot on the Farm and Shavuot on the Mountain. When things shift and grow there are new opportunities for the community to take interest in new projects.

This study seems to add evidence to the idea that there is an increasing alternative kosher meat supply chain. The changing face of industrial meat industry, while small and largely fringe, is discussed by Fishkoff in the last chapter of her book *Kosher Nation*. She postulates that the Agriprocessors “scandal and its fallout seem to have permanently altered the kosher world” (Fishkoff, 2010). In much of the literature there is a sentiment that since 2008, Jews have been more interested in taking more responsibility and paying closer attention to food. This seems to be very true in Vermont. In addition to Grow and Behold coming into existence following the Agriprocessors scandal, it was also around this time when Rabbi Ira Schiffer and his wife Linda used the incident as a “sort of ethical entry into” looking at the kinds of “meat that we put on our table” (Schiffer, p.c. , 2016). For Rabbi Schiffer, he will accept “kashrut, as kosher if it meets the ritual standard in the act itself and the intentionality.”

### **“Eco Kashrut” in Vermont**

The examples of Stacy Oshkello and Naomi Barrell represent a willingness and dedication to the procurement of kosher meat in Vermont that meets a certain set of ethical and environmental requirements in addition to the religious and spiritual requirements. It also begins to highlight the issue of differences in religious observance and interpretation which was mentioned, in some form, by every person that I spoke to while conducting my interviews.

### *The Religious Politics of Labeling*

It is important to understand that the conversation about what gets to be labeled as kosher and by whose standards is monopolized by halachic and orthodox perspectives and definition of kashrut. Kosher certification is also incredibly expensive. The kosher certification industry is a business as much as it is anything else (Lytton, 2013). All of the major kosher certification agencies are run by orthodox or Hasidic rabbis, and therefore those are the voices making decisions in the mainstream kosher world. It is only on the fringe do you hear voices from the

Conservative movement with initiatives like Magen Tzedek (Magen Tzedek, 2015), the social justice seal, which attempts to put larger Jewish values into a system of rabbinic supervision. Or from the renewal movements which put aside the ideas of *hechsures* and rabbinic supervision all together, and instead judge kosher food on other merits such as the intentionality of Jewish practice, environmental sustainability, and labor practices. Largely speaking, these liberal methods have not become main stream. However, looking specifically at the community in Vermont, being a peripheral community allows the alternative voices of kashrut to be heard on an equal playing field to the traditional supervisory kosher certifications.

This becomes most apparent when speaking with Stacy Oshkello. She talks about the fact that she boils her chickens at a certain temperature in order to prevent it from cooking in its blood, which would render the chicken not kosher due to the prohibition against eating the blood of an animal. Oshkello does this to ease the feather plucking process. In traditional *halacha*, putting the chickens in any kind of hot water before soaking and salting them would be considered cooking them in their blood. This prohibition makes it incredibly difficult to pluck the birds, creating more labor and time. So, while the Oshkello's have taken the time to thoughtfully consider this law, they have come to a different conclusion, and have decided to act in contradiction to the traditional rabbinical decision. Oshkello made it clear to me that she would make every effort to clarify to her potential buyers her kashrut practices, but this brings me back to the original question - who gets to decide what is labeled kosher?

In the United States, kosher supervision is done by private corporations, who set their own standards. Based on principles of the free market, each corporation's reputation is based on how strictly they keep to those standards. So what makes this different? Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that most *hechsures* are basically following the same rules, but have different reputations, and this form of kashrut without traditional rabbinic supervision does not follow those same baselines (Lytton, 2013, Fishkoff, 2011). The reason that *hechsures* work is because of widespread trust of a label, instead this kind of system would rely on small scale trust, representative of the size of the operation, and the conditions of Vermont. This kind of kashrut, does not even go by the same governing model, but would instead be based entirely on community trust rather than third party certification. Therefore, one would have to be in relationship with the person shechting and processing your meat in order to get an understanding

of their practices. This is a beautiful idea, and very consistent with the goals of the wider food movement, connecting the Jewish community to its farmer. Once again, it is essential to emphasize the wide range of opinions from the small group of people I spoke with alone. While some people I spoke to would be behind creating this new standard, holding this kind of meat as perfectly kosher for them and their families, others would be saddened or scandalized that some of their neighbors are choosing this interpretation of kashrut over the traditional *halacha*.

### *Law versus Intention*

I suppose that this question is really a parable for a much bigger question of how literally Jews should take the word of the written and oral tradition. How does one's relationship with G'd impact the interpretation of text and individuals' actions in the world. What are the ethical and religious ramifications of calling meat kosher that does not fit into the halachic framework? Does intentionality beat out rule of law? These are the kinds of struggles embodied in the debate on eco-kashrut, and are highlighted in various ways by the conversations I had with the Jewish Communities in Vermont, as well as in the larger Jewish environmental and food movements.

In Fishkoff's *Kosher Nation*, she talks of the people in the Jewish food movement, most coming from secular backgrounds and finding their way back into Judaism through food and environmental activism. She describes the "young activists" Jewish background and knowledge base as "sketchy" (Fishkoff, 2010). What does it mean for a Jewish food and environmental movement to be based off of rudimentary Jewish knowledge? On the other side, what does it mean for the largest kosher certification companies in the world, who have so much influence over the things Jews eat, to essentially ignore the Jewish values of food beyond the exact way the necks of the animal are cut, and how the blood is leached out of the animals before it is sold? They have backgrounds and extensive Jewish knowledge, so where do they draw the lines over some aspects of Torah food laws, and not the others? What other values are at play?

This dilemma is at the heart of the "eco-kosher" movement. There has always been a struggle in Jewish thought of placing a "fence around the Torah" or looking at the interpretations of Jewish law and following rules that limit one's ability to accidentally break a law, or go against a perceived intention of a law. Therefore, practical laws in the *Shulchan Aruch* today, which have been built upon the arguments of the Rabbi's before them, have been and will always be debated. Judaism is unique in that it keeps the record of not only the laws to keep, but also the

entire argument process of Rabbi's making those decisions. While the most observant always hold to the majority opinion of the sages of the past, in more liberal sects of Judaism, such as the Conservative movement, minority opinions are also considered and used to make decisions about behavior. Many in more orthodox or Hasidic traditions hold that performing a commandment "correctly" without intention, counts in the fulfillment of the mitzvah, but not the other way around. Of course, there are always discrepancies in laws and actions, no matter what sect or branch of Judaism one belongs to much like any other religion. Such is human nature.

In addition to this code of law are the values that are gleaned from the stories and the laws of Torah and mitzvot. Values mentioned in the literature about the protection of the Environment include the laws "bal taschit," do not waste, and "tzar ba'alei chayim," protection of the welfare of animals, which also work to inform actions. All mitzvot, or commandments are considered to be equal, however depending on one's other values, or an individual's relationship with the text, or the way that they have been socialized to be Jewish, changes the ways in which one practices and relates to the laws and commandments. Will one's commitment to environmental sustainability trump their practice of kashrut? Does a relationship with G!d always come first and environmental priorities second? I believe that Eco-kashrut hopes to make it so these kinds of decisions do not have to be made. That individuals can attain both their ethical and environmental values while maintaining their connection to G!d and Jewish community and tradition.

The word "yisrael" or "Israel" translates to "struggle." The Jewish people constantly struggle with tradition and revolution. The Torah is believed to be universal forever, so it is up to each individual and each generation to find the ways that it is relevant. But tradition is what makes us culturally Jewish. As Tevya, the lovable protagonist to the classic musical "*Fiddler on the Roof*" soliloquies "without tradition, our lives would be as shaky, as a fiddler on the roof." Tradition is not just considered from a sociological perspective, but also has real life ramifications on kashrut practice. In the Torah, instead of getting a list of descriptors of which birds can and cannot be considered kosher, there is a long list of which specific birds can and cannot be eaten. As the list is in biblical Hebrew, and we no longer understand which birds in particular the Torah is speaking about, the only birds that are considered kosher are the ones that have traditionally been considered kosher, following the reasoning that our ancestors must have

known, at some point in our collective history, which birds the Torah was referring to as forbidden (Abramowitz, 2016).

Each interviewee had different understandings of how to answer these questions, different relationships with Torah, G!d, and the world that we live in. Each had a different way of dealing with this struggle, and they came up with many different solutions to eating kosher food that fits their spiritual and environmental ethos. For Grow and Behold their power lay in their ability to speak both farmer and rabbi (Hanau, p.c., 2016). For Naomi Barell, the solution was to grow her own chickens and bring them down to Pennsylvania, and for the Oshkello's the solution was to learn the intentions and ritual practice of *schitah* themselves and to raise their own animals. For some people, the intentionality of *schitah* replaces the need for the traditional *halacha*, however, as exemplified by Grow and Behold, KOL Foods, and Just Good Kosher, it is possible for a company to hold responsibility for not just the *halachic* requirements of kashrut, but also the intentionality of kashrut.

### **Potential Models for Vermont**

Many of the people that I spoke with had ideas about different ways that kosher meat could be grown and slaughtered in Vermont. Taking the above into consideration, in addition to the ideas that my interviewees had, the following are a few different ways in which a local Vermont kosher meat procurement system could be set up.

#### *“Eco- Kosher” Model*

The first possibility is one that Rabbi Schiffer suggested. I could see a viable source of kosher sustainable meat in Vermont by having local Jewish farmers learn the intentions and laws of *schitah*, and to raise and slaughter their own animals as they see fit. This model would follow the guiding principles of Eco-kashrut, and strive to raise and slaughter their animals in accordance with both the tradition of kashrut and the principles of ethical labor and environmentally sustainable practices.

When interviewing Rabbi Schiffer, he brought up a very interesting Vermont example of this phenomenon. Matzah, is the unleavened bread that Jews are commanded to eat on Passover, the holiday celebrating the Jewish exodus out of slavery in Egypt. Passover has its own set of rules regarding kashrut that mostly safeguard the tradition to not eat leavened products for the eight days of the holiday. Traditionally, matzah is baked for no more than eighteen minutes,

with a rabbi watching every step of the process to ensure that it does not become leavened, or come in contact with non-kosher for Passover items. Matzah, traditionally made out of wheat flour is essentially a glorified cracker referred to as the “bread of our affliction.” A local bakery in Middletown Spring, VT owned by a Jewish family decided that they wanted to make matzah, with locally sourced, organically grown, non-GMO grains. While they make bread and other baked goods during the rest of the year, for the period of time that they make the matzah, they clean out their oven and just bake their Vermatzah. However, none of this is rabbinically supervised and because of this Vermatzah does not carry a hechsure. While they do not claim to be kosher, they do label themselves as “eco-kosher.” On their website they state that “Vermatzah is the perfect choice for people who identify with Jewish history and culture, who prize their Jewish roots and want to participate in the holidays, but who do not subscribe to Orthodox principles” (Vermatzah, 2016).

The Oshkellos’s and the Living Tree Alliance model could typify this strategy. Rabbi Micha Becker-Klein works with Craig Oshkello to learn the laws of *schitah* and to bring intentionality to his *shechting*. He has also written about the experience of “micro-*schitah*” where the two of them spent time slaughtering a small number of animals to supply meat for the family for the year. This model would not be able to supply all the members of the Jewish community of Vermont who want kosher meat, but it would be able to provide some meat for the community.

The sale of this kind of meat would pose a challenge. USDA regulation requires certain procedures for the selling of meat. However, there are ways that the community could get around these regulations if the setup is small. When speaking with Karen Freudenberger, an advisor for the Colchester Goat Collaborative, and the Pine Island Community Farm, she mentioned the process in which members of the Burlington and Colchester Muslim community slaughter *halal* goats. The goats are owned by individuals rather than the farms so the goat owners can have the goats slaughtered as they wish without having to go through USDA inspections and procedures (Frueденberger, p.c., 2016). If the Oshkellos’s wanted to raise sheep or chickens for another member of the Jewish community, this would follow the same loophole. The owner of the animal could then hire the Oshkellos’s to slaughter their animals understanding their kosher practice and philosophy.

This model would rely on community trust, collaboration, and the setting of local standards of kashrut. This would not be able to fill the needs of all the Jews in Vermont, but this system could also serve as an educational tool. After all, part of Living Tree Alliance's mission is to "create opportunities for learning, insight, healing and inspiration"(Living Tree Alliance).

#### *A Buying Club or Cooperative Model*

Joe Regenstein of the Cornell Kosher and *Halal* Food Initiative, disagrees with Rabbi Salzman's assessment that the marketing is the hardest part of setting up any kind of small scale kosher meat system. Regenstein believes that one could "learn to understand your market just like anybody does" however it is the "actual slaughter and the post slaughter handling" which poses the challenge.

Another possibility in Vermont could be to create a buying club centered in one of the Vermont communities' synagogues that brings in larger orders of kosher sustainable meat from out of state, perhaps from Grow and Behold or KOL Foods. This would decrease shipping costs, and is the primary mode of business for both companies who already have a system in place to address all of the challenges of storage, rabbinic supervision, and slaughter capacity. Potentially, meat grown in Vermont could be sold to Grow and Behold, and then with their knowledge base they could figure out all of the logistics. The next step would be to set up a cooperative for Vermont, perhaps with some kind of community buyback program of the meat specifically grown locally. This Vermont label would also be desirable for the processing company as a value added product due to the high esteem of the Vermont brand.

#### *Working with Non-Jewish Neighbors and Secular Slaughter Houses: Just Good Kosher*

Hanau explained the fact that Jews have always interacted with their non-Jewish neighbors in the kosher meat business, because it does not make economic sense to just throw away the parts of the animals which are not kosher (Hanau, conference sessions, 2016). As Yisroel Jacobs outlines in his explanation of the industrial meat system, the entire back half of the cow is sold back to the slaughterhouses as part of the business deal to use the plant to run a line of kosher meat for a set amount of time. Creating relationships with the local secular slaughterhouses enables at scale kosher slaughter to become economically feasible in small communities like Vermont.



This poses a significant challenge since none of the slaughterhouses in Vermont are currently set up to meet the needs of kosher slaughter. Regenstein specifically mentioned that this kind of partnership is made much easier if the processing plant is designed “from the ground up” when the plant is originally set up to facilitate the production of kosher and non-kosher meat. If the slaughterhouses are designed for “dual use” so that it can be “used for kosher slaughter on an occasion” while predominantly processing non-kosher meat, Regenstein postulates that the operation “might break into the economically feasible.” In short this model allows for sustainable meat to be grown locally and slaughtered in a dual use facility in cooperation between Jews and their predominantly non-Jewish neighbors. This is exactly what Angus Johnson from Just Good Kosher intends to implement in Vermont. As previously stated, Johnson has been speaking with some Vermont slaughterhouses who would be willing to make the kind of installations necessary to kosher processing into their plants. This appears to be the most feasible way to get local, sustainable, and ethically produced, kosher meat to the Jewish community in Vermont.

As mentioned in the literature, Timothy Lytton cites that only 8% of individuals who specifically buy kosher food do so because they are religiously observant Jews. Therefore, a kosher and sustainable meat market in Vermont might be appealing to other communities inside and outside the state. This would expand the market even further, and perhaps incentivize local slaughterhouses to adapt their facilities to the necessities of kosher slaughter. If the processors would see their market as larger than just the Jewish population, and consider all the others who might be interested in kosher meat as Lytton suggests, then non-kosher slaughterhouses might see kosher meat as a value added product that there would be serious demand for, and therefore turn a greater profit.

This model could be supported by a cooperative of some kind where the processor’s main markets are in Montreal or Boston, but a portion of the Vermont meat is ordered based on demand or need for a Vermont collective that orders together. Both Rabbi Schiffer and Susan Leff mentioned Green Pastures Meat, a local non-kosher butcher in Shelburne, Vermont that specializes in local meat. Perhaps there is an opportunity for him to partner with a *shochet* and *shect* a small quantity of meat for the Jewish Community on occasion.

## Conclusion

In Roger and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, there is a moment where Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother sing about how it's impossible for a pumpkin to turn into a carriage. Then, of course, to Cinderella's astonishment, the pumpkin turns into a carriage. Shrugging, the Fairy Godmother states that Cinderella was wishing so hard that she just had to do it. The two launch right back into singing;

“Because these daft and dewy eyed dopes, keep building up impossible hopes, impossible things are happening every day” – Roger and Hammerstein, *Cinderella*

Vermont is a unique place. From GMO Labeling Bills to revolutionary presidential candidates, Vermont collectively scoffs at being told that it cannot do something because of its size. From what I have heard and seen throughout this project, the Jewish Community in Vermont operates in the same way. Based on my assessment of the current situation involving kosher meat in Vermont, and the efforts that are already being made by local individuals to provide their own kosher meat that also holds to their high ethical and environmental standards, I believe that the Jewish community in Vermont is just “daft and dewy eyed” enough to make it happen.

While I am confident that it could be possible for the Jewish community to figure out a way to procure meat for themselves that is in line with their religious/spiritual values and their value of sustainability, I am sure that it would be impossible to have local kosher meat in the ways that it is typically conceptualized. Robert Schine, of Middlebury College, laughed when he stated that “this state is so full of idealists.” There is a sense of idealism in Vermont and in the Jewish community here that makes me understand why all the Vermonters I spoke with seem to think that it is possible to find a solution to this problem, despite the overwhelming challenges. At the end of this project, based on my experiences and the people I spoke to, I think that I have to agree with them.

The history of Jewish peoplehood in Vermont reflects that of American Jewry in small communities all over the country. While in the time before World War II many small Jewish communities were able to employ *shochtim* to have local kosher meat, with the consolidation and industrialization of the kosher and secular meat market those smaller enterprises have

disappeared generally across the country. With those changes to the scale of meat production has come significant environmental and social costs. Evident from the 2008 Agriprocessors scandal and others like it, kosher meat production is not necessarily morally above the regular secular meat supply, despite popular belief that kosher food “answers to a higher authority” (Fishkoff, 2010). It is then up to each individual and community to decide how they are going to react to the contradictions that exist.

There are many factors that might push the Jewish community of Vermont towards the desire to have local and sustainable kosher meat. Has the community here come to this because they are living in Vermont surrounded by the burgeoning alternative food movement? Are they compelled by their Jewish values? Is it some kind of combination of both? The conversation about what constitutes the qualification of kosher certification is not just in conflict in Vermont, but in the Jewish communities everywhere. Notions of “eco-kashrut” while largely fringe have begun to percolate into the conversations on the larger stage. In contrast to the Italian mafia takeover of kosher meat in the 1920s, there is no longer fear among the general Jewish population about the *halachic* kosher status of meat sold in the US. With the rise of the Jewish environmental and food movement as described by Fishkoff and Lytton, and the rise in popularity of conscious and “clean” eating particularly in Vermont, it makes sense that there would be an intersection of the religious and environmental conversations in this specific Jewish community.

Looking to find solutions to this issue through a Jewish lens has immense potential. As covered in the literature, the Jewish tradition has much to offer to the realm of conscious eating and sustainable practices. The challenge then, as it always becomes, is living out the values idealized in the scripture. Jews are not the only people doing this and religion writ large has long lasting impacts on its practitioners. The field of religion and ecology, with so many people looking toward religion to find right action, is an extraordinary tool which I hope to explore more in the future.

Through this project it is clear that the Jewish Community of Vermont is engaging the classic Jewish question “what are we going to eat?” Wrapped up in that question are passionate individuals whom I spoke to in this paper. They are on the ground doing the work to answer that question for themselves for different reasons and go about it from different angles, but it is clear

that this question is being struggled with, as it has been for thousands of years. If I had one suggestion for the community in Vermont it is to find someone who is interested in taking up this struggle on a more permanent basis. Someone who could potentially take this research, and continue the work needed to make kosher meat available that is consistent with the greater values of the community.

This thesis has brought up more for me than the thrills of an engaging academic pursuit, although there was plenty of that as well. As I spoke with members of the Jewish communities in Vermont, I listened not only to search for answers to these questions, but also because I am still struggling to find how I want to believe. Speaking with a diverse group, of different backgrounds and interpretations of faith allowed me to try on different perspectives. In the fruition of this project I have constantly challenged my own views and opinions of where I stand on the continuum of Jewish observance and culture. How do I decide what meets my kosher standards? How do I engage with my community? How do my environmental food values interact with my spiritual needs? I have struggled through the holy texts of Jewish ancestry, and with my very relationship with G!d, and have ultimately come out of this endeavor with more questions than answers. Some would argue being in such a state is the ultimate Jewish, and perhaps human condition. So, here I digress, but by no means does that mean that I am done exploring.

This paper is not the first time the question of local kosher meat has come up in Vermont, and hopefully it will not be the last. There is a lot of work that needs to be done for this conversation to move off the page and into reality. In order to do this, someone must decide that they want to take charge of the logistics. If there was an individual or a group of individuals in the Jewish community that would want to take this sort of meat to happen, further research must be done. While this paper explores the concepts for broad models based on the factors already at play, it does not represent any sort of market analysis or take into account the specifics of economics. These topics would require further study in the future.

Inherent in many faith traditions are the values of environmental stewardship, or oneness, or non-harm. If religion is such a big part of so many people's lives, why is there a disparity between these values and what we see in the world? People of faith have a lot to bring to the environmental movement; we just need to figure out a way to more effectively encourage people

of faith to act on those values. If the Jewish community is going to continue to eat meat, I hope that it does so with compassion and understanding, as it is commanded in our Jewish texts, and compelled through our humanity. Through this study I hope that I took Heschel's words to heart, and that this work could contribute to creating a revolutionary religious movement that uses prayer to motivate the changes we must make in order to live in a world that inspires hope, health, and happiness and good food for all.

## Appendix

### *Survey Questions*

Where do you live?

Are you affiliated with any specific Jewish organization in Vermont? Which one(s)?

Do you, or anyone in your household, eat meat?

Yes- often

Yes- rarely

No- never

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you keep kosher?

Yes

No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you eat meat where do you usually buy it?

Would you buy local sustainable kosher meat if it were available?

Yes- absolutely!

Maybe- tell me more

No, I would not be interested in this kind of product

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Who do you know in the community that I should be talking to about this?

Would you be interested in talking about this more? If so please provide your email.

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