



Kosher: Private Regulation in the Age of Industrial Food

Timothy D. Lytton

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Generating over \$12 billion in annual sales, kosher food is big business. It is also an unheralded story of successful private-sector regulation in an era of growing public concern over the government's ability to ensure food safety. *Kosher* uncovers how independent certification agencies rescued American kosher supervision from fraud and corruption and turned it into a model of nongovernmental administration.

Currently, a network of over three hundred private certifiers ensures the kosher status of food for over twelve million Americans, of whom only eight percent are religious Jews. But the system was not always so reliable. At the turn of the twentieth century, kosher meat production in the United States was notorious for scandals involving price-fixing, racketeering, and even murder. Reform finally came with the rise of independent kosher certification agencies which established uniform industry standards, rigorous professional training, and institutional checks and balances to prevent mistakes and misconduct.

In overcoming many of the problems of insufficient resources and weak enforcement that hamper the government, private kosher certification holds important lessons for improving food regulation, Timothy Lytton argues. He views the popularity of kosher food as a response to a more general cultural anxiety about industrialization of the food supply. Like organic and locavore enthusiasts, a growing number of consumers see in rabbinic supervision a way to personalize today's vastly complex, globalized system of food production.

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