


## Business

### High-tech kosher cooking Meals that heat themselves and 'taste normal'

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In early January, the Bahamas beckoned to Arona Schneider, 25, of Manhattan, so she and a friend booked a four-day cruise on Carnival. The ship offered lavish lobster-tail dinners and breakfast spreads, but Schneider and her friend keep kosher, so they packed their own buffet.

They brought self-heating kosher meals that they had purchased at a Queens branch of Super-Sol, an Israeli grocery chain, for about \$8 each. The La Briute meals, including spaghetti and meatballs, cheese ravioli, and chicken primavera and noodles, were a hit. "They were so easy to do, and they tasted normal," Schneider said.

At this time of year, many food markets create special kosher for Passover displays, but increasingly there are special kosher food sections throughout the year.

La Briute meals, by New Jersey-based Euro-Cut Inc., come in a cardboard box with a plastic-wrapped entree, plastic utensils, soup and cookies, and a moistened napkin. The box includes two packets that are combined to create heat to warm the meal.

The packets, one containing magnesium and iron and the other salt water, are the same technology used for military rations in the field.

As for the use on the Sabbath, Conservative Rabbi H. Joseph Simckes, of the Hollis Hills Jewish Center, said, "If the chemical process merely heats the food but doesn't change its fundamental status from raw to cooked, then it would most likely be considered acceptable for Sabbath use."

"However, if the heating process is such that cooking does occur and changes the nature of the substance, then it would be prohibited for Sabbath use because cooking is one of the prohibited activities of the Sabbath, while warming or heating is considered acceptable."

Abe Halberstam, president of Euro-Cut, said consumers with questions should consult their rabbi.

Kosher food in the United States is an \$8.25-billion industry, according to Lubicom Marketing Consulting, a market research firm in Brooklyn. Sales of kosher foods have grown by between 12 percent and 15 percent annually for the past 10 years.

Muslims and Seventh Day Adventists seek out kosher food because of similar dietary restrictions, according to Rabbi Moshe Elefant, executive rabbinical coordinator of the Orthodox Union, the largest kosher certification body in the world.

In the military, keeping kosher was a challenge before 1996, when a Chicago-based company My Own Meals Inc. won the contract to supply the military with kosher MREs - so-called "meals ready to eat." This year, the military has ordered 9,600 seder suppers, according to My Own Meals president Mary Anne Jackson.

My Own Meals sells portable kosher meals, including a beef stew for Passover once a year, to small specialty stores and retailers. "We're kings and queens of the little guy," Jackson said. But MoM doesn't include the heat packets in its retail meals.

La Briute meals are not currently kosher for Passover, but the company will have a Passover product next year, according to company spokesman Meyer Futersak.

Halberstam, who grew up in a kosher home in Brooklyn, said he got started in food service by chance, when he helped a friend sell sliced apples. He got the idea for self-heating kosher meals in 1999, when, because he had bid on several food service contracts, he was included in discussions with New York City on Y2K preparedness. One of the ideas mentioned was military MREs, a seeming answer to the question of how to feed people during a potential crisis.

Halberstam obtained the right to use the self-heating pouches from patent-holder Cincinnati-based Heater Meals.

Freelance writer Cara Trager contributed to this story.