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Mishpacha



Bugs BEW

Mishpacha Junior Speaks



Twenty years ago, it was nearly impossible for a kid to eat broccoli, cauliflower, or spinach without also eating dozens of bugs. You might think that's no problem — you don't care for spinach, anyway — but I bet your body wouldn't agree. These vegetables are packed with valuable vitamins that help you in numerous ways.

So how are these veggies now available to *frum* families along with clean strawberries, lettuce, asparagus, and more? It's thanks to Bodek, the bug-free vegetables company. Mishpacha Junior interviewed Mr. Yitzchok Rosenbluth, general manager of Bodek, to get an inside look at how Bodek gets insects to bug off.

MJ: Hi Mr. Rosenbluth. Can you tell us how Bodek came into existence?

YR: There was a distinguished *chaburah* (group) of *talmidei chachamim* in Lakewood who were learning *hilchos tola'im*, the halachos related to the prohibition of eating insects. They saw that many people didn't realize that some of the foods they were eating were infested with insects and needed to be checked. Others realized there was a problem and didn't know how to deal with it, so they simply never ate certain vegetables.

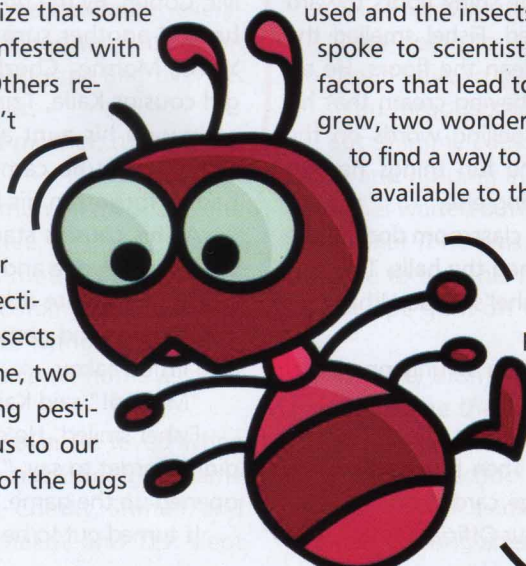
An additional issue was the changes in the bug population. For many years, the pesticides and insecticides sprayed onto vegetables to kill insects were quite effective. However, over time, two things happened. Some of the strong pesticides were discovered to be dangerous to our health and were outlawed. And many of the bugs

became genetically immune to the sprays. So the problem of bugs in food became more severe.

Some of these *rabbanim* went down to California, where a lot of these vegetables are grown, due to the state's excellent climate, to see for themselves the growing methods used and the insects that infest the vegetables. They also spoke to scientists to learn about the environmental factors that lead to cleaner vegetables. Once awareness grew, two wonderful men from Brooklyn decided to try to find a way to make these usually infested vegetables available to the *frum* public, bug-free.

MJ: What did they do?

YR: The first step was to try to import bug-free lettuce from Israel. However, at that time, it was illegal to import lettuce. We had a *lobby* (a group of people who work to influence lawmakers) and they were





With the Manager of Bodek

influential in having the law changed. But a local solution was still needed. And so in 1991, Bodek started producing shredded lettuce.

MJ: What does that entail?

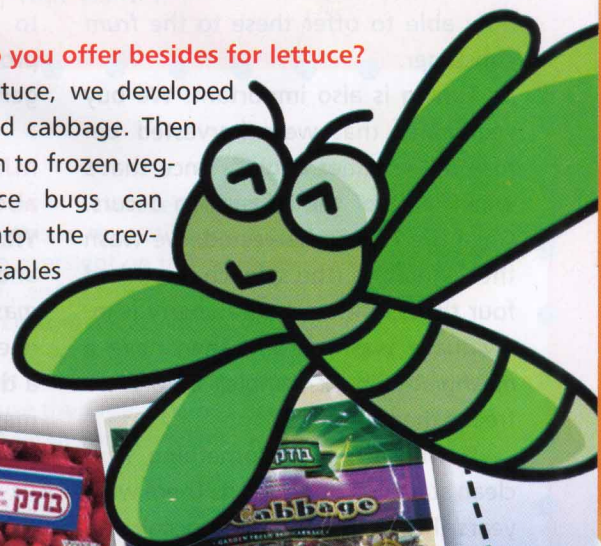
YR: The first step is ensuring that the lettuce comes from the field in a clean state. We look all across the country to find fields that are well kept and produce crops that are particularly clean. In addition, there's a *mashgiach* who visits the fields and inspects the crop. Anything that's infested, we don't use.

The next steps are removing the outer leaves, which are much more susceptible to infestations, and then washing the leaves. Machines to clean lettuce have been around for years. However, those machines were created to get rid of dirt, not bugs. So we took the existing machines and made

them much more powerful. We added heavier sprays, extra agitation, and more filters. In addition, the lettuce is shredded very finely before being washed, so no insects can hide in a lettuce clump and escape the jets of water. After that heavy cleaning, there is a *mashgiach tmidi* who spot-checks the washed lettuce. Bodek is certified with four *hechsherim* — Rabbi Shlomo Gissinger of Lakewood, Hisachdus Harabonim, the CRC, and the OU.

MJ: What do you offer besides for lettuce?

YR: After lettuce, we developed salad mix and cabbage. Then we moved on to frozen vegetables. Since bugs can get deep into the crevices of vegetables





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like broccoli, we make sure to buy produce that's very clean to begin with. To accomplish that, we buy from fields around the world. When Californian strawberries became infested, we went to several countries until we found a good crop of strawberries. We recently started working with farmers who have a number of well-screened greenhouses. They've been growing romaine lettuce, fresh baby spinach, spring leaves, scallions, dill, and parsley for us, and we're now able to offer these to the *frum* consumer.

Timing is also important. We buy vegetables that were harvested before the summer begins, since that's when most of the infestation occurs. Once the crop is harvested, we wash the vegetables (the spinach is washed four times, and each strawberry is individually washed) and then have a *mashgiach* check samples before we freeze them.

If we can't find something in a clean state, we don't sell it. There were years that we ran out of broccoli and others when we ran short of asparagus. And that's fine. Because when it comes to halachah, you can't take shortcuts.

MJ: How do you feel that Bodek has changed the *frum* market?

YR: It's created a revolution in the supermarket. Now, in any *frum* grocery store, you'll find an entire section of bug-free produce, both fresh and frozen. Checking vegetables is very hard; it's not enough to have a light box, you need to know what you're looking for. Bug-free produce saves people time and prevents the worry that you're not checking properly. In addition to the awareness we brought to adults, we also run educational programs in schools to teach the next generation about the *issur* of *tolaim*.

MJ: What do you personally enjoy about working for Bodek?

YR: I've been here for twenty years and every day is different. Since our *mashgichim* work all over the world, I need to be on call twenty-four hours a day to deal with any problems that may crop up — a truck that broke down, a missed flight, and so on.

I've become an expert not only in the business side of things, but also in biology and technology. We have a full-time scientist on staff and I also consult with food technologists who do lab tests on the food, tell me

the exact nutritional information to print on our packages, and advise me how to mass-produce food like broccoli soufflé. It's a fascinating job.

MJ: Sure sounds interesting. What are the difficult aspects of your work?

YR: I'm always aware of what a tremendous responsibility we have. People are relying on us for kashrus and that means we have to be ever so careful.

MJ: I'd say the fact that you're worried about the kashrus of your product makes you the perfect man for the job! Thanks for giving us an inside peek at Bodek. 😊

