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## Ethics Sigi Ziering

This year, our Sigi Ziering column focuses on the ethics of kashrut. Each month, an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with what Jewish texts and our tradition teach us about the food we eat: the preparation of food, the people who prepare our food, the food and restaurants that are deemed kosher. This column is sponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband, Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit [shma.com](http://shma.com) to view the series and responses.

Devora Kimelman-Block is the founder and CEO of KOL Foods, the nation's only retailer of nonindustrial, grass-raised kosher beef, lamb, and poultry.

A native of Chicago, she is a founding member of Eastern Village Cohousing in Silver Spring, Md., where she lives with her husband, Jason, and their three children, Esther, Natan, and Simone.

# Sustainable Agriculture

DEVORA KIMELMAN-BLOCK

A year ago, I found myself in inner-city Baltimore, shoveling manure into a garbage bag in a gas station parking lot. The gas station attendants were none too pleased when my farmer's trailer, with live cattle in the back, pulled in and, accidentally, deposited a pile of dung that had slid out under the door. Not okay to put it in their garbage cans, they said. We had to take it with us.

Welcome to my world. I never thought this would be part of my Jewish journey. How, you may ask, did I find myself shoveling manure in a gas station parking lot? I am the founder of KOL Foods, which makes available and promotes sustainable food systems. Specifically, I provide kosher beef, lamb, and now poultry. Less than ten USDA certified slaughterhouses remain in the United States that kill their animals according to the laws of kashrut. I work with one of those slaughterhouses in downtown Baltimore, which has been family owned and operated since the 1800s.

Sustainable agriculture is a way of producing food in which animals are treated humanely and the environment, farm, and factory are healthy for workers and consumers. Before industrialization, animals were raised in organic pastures, and the meat, which was expensive, was considered a treat.

Today, the focus at industrial animal farms is on gaining short-term profit — with minimal concern for the environment, workers, animals, or the consumer's health. Such farm production raises several environmental issues, including the pollution of U.S. waterways. Public health issues, listed below, are staggering:


- Waste matter causes food-borne illness (like *E. coli*), and, in the United States alone, sickens 76 million people and kills 5,000 people every year.
- Cattle and lamb are ruminants; their native diet is grass. When they eat grain, it makes their internal organs acidic, which makes their *E.coli* much more toxic for humans.
- A 1998 *Consumer Reports* study revealed that 71 percent of store-bought chicken was contaminated with salmonella. The recent outbreak of salmonella in peanuts has been traced to factory meat farms whose manure was spread on fields and then seeped into waterways.
- While studies have warned that eating conventional red meat lowers one's life expectancy, many doctors recommend eating grass-fed meat (without antibiotics or growth hormones) that is rich in heart-healthy Omega-3 fatty acids and cancer-fighting CLAs.

In addition to the health issues are animal and worker welfare concerns. For example, animals are crammed together in confined areas without access to sunlight and fresh air; their feet don't even touch the ground. Workers experience dangerous conditions, including exposure to dust and gases, as well as workplace injuries.

Factory farms produce lots of really cheap meat. While the low cost can be advantageous to consumers, it does not reveal the actual costs to our society, our environment, or our Jewish values. *continued on page 17*

what Jewish life in Nabeul had been like, only to find that “hardly anyone in my family could give me a good sense of that and, even if they did, the line between myth and history was blurred. It was not until I realized that I could see the places where my family had lived for centuries that this almost mythical place became real.”

Diarna marks a beginning toward preserving and reconstructing a more comprehensive, interactive, and “living” exploration of the


heartland of Jewish heritage. In the process, we are, moreover, creating a prototype for digital preservation that can be replicated for Jewish sites in Europe (where thousands of sites are similarly endangered), as well as the cultural heritage sites of other ethnic groups and civilizations around the world. Contrary to the age-old reality, memory may no longer be a place where only those who have been before can go; now, we can all return home. 

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The standing definition of kosher meat is that it comes from a kosher animal that is slaughtered according to the laws of kashrut and passes a kosher inspection. How the farm or factory that supplies the meat treats its workers and animals are all nonfactors. So when the nonkosher meat industry adopted industrial practices, the kosher meat industry followed suit.

To be designated “organic” means that animals eat organic feed and do not receive hormones or antibiotics; it says nothing about how the animals or factory workers are treated. In fact, these “industrial organic” systems have many of the same issues as conventional plants. A more important distinction is between

meat that is industrially produced and meat that has been produced sustainably from family farms that do not use feedlots.

At KOL Foods, I hope to put ethics — the moral code of how animals are raised for slaughter — and kashrut back on the same plate. We should eat in a way that honors the Earth and the life that was taken in order for us to eat. We can all help do this by pressuring the kosher meat industry to raise its standards; eat consciously — that is, bless the food and reflect on how it came to the table; eat sparingly — eating meat will feel more special if it’s eaten only on holidays and Shabbat; don’t swallow your ethics — consume only sustainable, non-industrial meat. 

## Create a Salon in Your Community

### Add to the culture of learning in your community! It's easy!

The *Sh'ma* Salon is a forum for adults to use the journal *Sh'ma* as a tool and a vehicle for discussing issues of contemporary Jewish thought. The *Sh'ma* Salon does not require prior Jewish knowledge or in-depth reading on the part of the coordinators, presenters, or participants.

- The Salon creates inclusive conversations.
- The Salon is a formal, moderated, small-group discussion on specific issues facing contemporary Jews.
- The Salon advances understanding of complicated issues.
- The Salon creates a dialogue built on mutual respect and intellectual excitement about our differences.
- The Salon offers opportunities to teach and be taught, to listen and be listened to, to inspire and be inspired.
- The Salon creates a laboratory for sharing innovative and thoughtful ideas.



Contact Susan Berrin, editor of *Sh'ma*, for more information: [SBerrin@shma.com](mailto:SBerrin@shma.com)  
Go online to [www.shma.com/salon](http://www.shma.com/salon) for a list of topics and guided steps about how to start a *Sh'ma* Salon in your own community.

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What Jewish conversation would you like to have? Send suggestions for future *Sh'ma* topics to [SBerrin@shma.com](mailto:SBerrin@shma.com).