

Markets Scramble for *Shemittah* Produce

Supermarket chains and vegetable retailers have asked the Agriculture Ministry to allow them to import 30% of Israel's vegetables without any customs duty during the coming *shemittah* year, which starts in only three weeks.

The 30% number has caused an uproar among local vegetable growers, who claim that only 13%-15% of vegetables are bought by religious or chareidi consumers who are strict about *shemittah*.

Farmers are accusing the retailers of trying to make a killing off the extra imports at the expense of local growers.

The IDF, meanwhile, intends to import produce from the Gaza Strip on a trial basis ahead of the *shemittah* year.

"We plan to conduct a few test runs to see if we can find the right mechanism that will work during *shemittah*," a high-ranking defense



official said Sunday. "We do not deal with Hamas and talk strictly with local Palestinian farmers and merchants."

Col. Nir Press, head of the Gaza Liaison Administration, is responsi-

ble for arranging the import of the produce. Press is coordinating the transfer of the goods with Fatah officials in Ramallah who are in charge of the Gaza crossings on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

The IDF is setting up a similar mechanism in Judea and Samaria, particularly in the Jordan Valley, to facilitate the use of Arab-grown produce there. OC Jordan Valley Brigade Col. Yigal Slovik has held meetings with religious officials to coordinate the transfer of produce.

Religious authorities have asked Slovik to deploy soldiers in the fields on the days of the harvest to protect the *mashgichim*, who will be there to ensure that the produce actually belongs to non-Jews.

They want to ensure that Jewish farmers don't ship their own produce into an Arab village and then claim it was grown on Arab-owned land. (News agencies)

Ministry Prohibits Cell Phone 'Minute Plan'

12-second increments to be eliminated by 2009

By Meir Gold

Cellular companies in Israel will no longer be allowed to offer per-minute call-rate tariff packages to new customers, the Communications Ministry announced Monday.

"Citizens are losing money day by day, minute by minute, because of the per-minute billing tariff," said Communications Minister Ariel Attias. "As part of our policy to protect the consumer, it is our responsibility to put an end to this billing matrix."

Starting from the beginning of September, cellular companies will not be allowed to market per-minute

tariff plans to new subscribers, while existing subscribers will have the option to switch to a per-second tariff plan.

According to data compiled by the ministry, 64% of all cellular phone calls are less than a minute and as a result, on average, 25%-40% of a cell phone "minute plan" bill is unused airtime.

The ministry added that research showed the rate of subscribers on the per-minute tariff as a percentage of all private subscribers in the cellular market rose from 1% in September 2005 to 10% in May 2006.

Beginning at the end of 2005, cell phone companies began offering their customers "minute plans" in which subscribers were charged for a full minute of service whether or not the entire 60 seconds was used.

To offer this plan, however, cell phone providers had to agree to offer customers a "12-second option" as well, in which calls are charged in 12-second increments.

However, mobile phone companies directed most of their marketing toward presenting customers with the minute plan, with one company in particular having 80% of its subscribers signed up to that plan.

But the days of even the 12-second plan are numbered. As of Jan. 1, 2009, the ministry plans to eliminate the 12-second option, and have all customers charged per second.

"The time has come for customers to pay for exactly the amount of time they speak, like at Bezeq, and not that a customer should have to pay for 12 seconds if he spoke for only two," the ministry said in a statement.

Cellcom announced last week that it was already offering this option. Although it is not applicable to all subscribers, the company has launched a plan called "Cellcom by the second."

The track also has no subscription fee, and no obligations such as an airtime tariff of NIS 0.01 per second. Pelephone is also launching such a plan, and Orange apparently has one in the pipeline.

The Communications Ministry isn't overly enthusiastic about these plans, however.

"We expect that the transfer to second increments should be done on a comprehensive level in all plans and tracks. The customers should pay for how much they speak, no matter which plan they join."

supervisor of consumer protection, notes that not long ago a similar indictment was issued against the Daka Ha-90 agency.

Since then, travel agencies have registered significant improvement in their advertising and remote transaction policies.

Ministry Demands Fish Label Change

The Dagei Mehadrin company must remove the word "denis" from the label of a product that is comprised of other fish and not denis, the Consumer Protection

Supervisor in the Industry, Trade and Labor, Yitzchak Kimchi, said.

Kimchi ordered Dagei Mehadrin to stop marketing a product called "Filet of Denis" because the product does not contain any denis fish.

The manufacturers defended themselves, saying that the package stated (albeit in small print) that the product contained a fish "that tastes like denis," but the disclaimer did not satisfy Kimchi, who said such labeling misleads consumers, in contravention to the Consumer Protection Law.

(Compiled from reports by *Hamodia* staff, news agencies and *Haaretz* service)

Visa Cal Abandoning Point System

By Meir Gold

Say good-bye to you Visa points. After being the one to introduce the point system in Israel, Visa Cal is canceling it, and instead is launching a new program of fixed discounts in 40 retail chains.

The new plan, which was launched last week, is being promoted by a widespread advertising campaign, worth NIS 10m., which claims that that consumers did not gain anything from the point system.

Under the point system, with every swipe of the card, the consumer accumulated points that could eventually be redeemed. But now that it has launched the new system, the company openly concedes that customers earned only about 40 agorot for every NIS 1,000 they spent.

For *Hamodia* readers this is nothing new. In report published some time ago in *Hamodia*, it was made clear that anyone who used their card for the sole purpose of earning points was making a mistake. Now Visa is admitting this as well.

"Only 3% of customers use the points they accumulate. Seventy percent don't even know how many points they have, while 30% don't open the booklet of offers that they receive," said Boaz Chechik, CEO of Visa Cal. "Seventy percent of respondents to a survey said they would prefer a new reward system."

Thus, the point system will be terminated, with the exception of cards that are linked to El Al's frequent flyer Matmid program. Customers who want to accumulate airline credits can choose this program instead of the discounts scheme, and

continue to receive points.

Old points can be used until the end of 2008 on specials that will be offered by the company through the chains with which it has signed deals.

Under Visa's new plan every customer can choose the retail chains where he wants to receive discounts. The customer can choose up to 30 chains, with the number based on how much his average bill is every month. The discounts will be applied at every purchase, even on sale items.

The company signed agreements with several retail chains, among them Tzomet Books, Hadran, Delta, Naaman, Fatal Hotels, Sbarro, Kravitz, New Pharm, Shoes To Go, Pozilov Diamonds, Euroka, and others. The discounts will range between 5% and 20%, with most chains offering 10%.

Every half a year the customer can alter his list. The plan is aimed at those holding Visa Cal and Mastercard cards. Diners Club cardholders will be offered a different rewards program.

Visa's new plan has put competitors on the defensive, with executives of other credit companies saying that Visa itself had made the point system unattractive, which is why customers didn't use it.

"Most stores and chains that have signed agreements with Visa are not considered leading companies," said one executive. "The companies where most consumers make their purchases are not on the list."

This is certainly true of chareidi customers; there are virtually no stores on the list that cater to us.

Apparently the chareidi sector, whose credit card usage has been skyrocketing, is not yet worth Visa's attention.

MESILA

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have a lot of income — especially if you have children and are eligible for child tax credits.

Remember: Having to pay taxes is a good sign. It means that you are earning money.

The Stock Market

You write that the stock market has potential for huge profits and huge losses. That is certainly true. Good investors, however, usually do not accrue huge profits or huge losses. They avoid the temptation of day trading and speculation, and instead build a diversified portfolio and watch their money grow *over time*.

While the stock market fluctuates wildly in the short term, it has historically risen consistently in the long term. Time and patience are therefore the keys to successful stock market investing.

USED CARS

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papers to prevent any possibility of the seller fraudulently swapping papers at the last moment.

Transfer of ownership must be done as soon as the money changes hands, because any traffic violations committed by the car are considered the responsibility of the registered owner. You must then immediately

As the saying goes, "Bulls make money, bears make money, but pigs get slaughtered." Stock market investors who try to make a lot of money in a short time often find themselves licking the wounds inflicted by their own greed.

At Mesila, we favor index funds over other varieties of stocks. Index funds are linked to stock market indices (such as the S&P or the Nasdaq), and their performance usually mirrors that of their respective indices. Index funds generally yield positive results over time, while funds that attempt to outperform the index frequently end up lagging behind it.

Stocks are an integral part of every well-balanced investment portfolio. What percentage of your portfolio they should occupy depends on your overall financial picture, and is best determined by a financial adviser.

call your insurance agent and take out insurance for the car in your name; ask the seller to refrain from canceling his insurance until you do.

The seller, however, must take the compulsory insurance document out of the car before handing it over, because he must return it to his insurance company to get a refund for the remainder of his insurance after he cancels it.



YOUR MONEY

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Likewise, customers who did not have Isracard stars had to add \$20 to the advertised price, the Industry, Trade and Labor Ministry said.

The Consumer Protection Law forbids the advertising of tourist services without including all the various payments and fees that apply. Furthermore, Eshet did not properly clarify its customers' rights to cancel remote transactions.

Eshet is not the only travel agency to find itself on the defendant's bench for similar crimes. Zamiir Chayat, the ministry's deputy