

Current Status

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As Kermit so famously said, it's not easy being green. But it certainly is increasingly popular, for consumers as well as marketers. Environmental awareness has seeped into and permeated most aspects of society, culture and trade. It has become a big part of the advertising and marketing scene as consumers' increased interest in health and wellness, as well as this increased concern for the environment, has fueled the move to buy products that make environmental, natural, or organic claims.

While the overall market for cosmetics in the United States is very mature and experiencing slow growth in the range of 1 to 3%, the sector of cosmetics making environmental, natural or organic claims ("green claims", "green products" or the "green cosmetics market") is projected to experience double digit growth for the foreseeable future¹. Although representing only a small segment of the market (3 to 10% in most product categories), the fast growth of the green cosmetics market is both a cause and an effect of increasing attention by marketers. The green product trend has moved into the mainstream in most consumer product categories. In the cosmetics markets, the large multinationals are either buying smaller green product brands or launching their own green product lines, or both. Green claims are increasingly popular in all marketing channels, from prestige to drug stores.

Imaginative researchers in progressive companies are pushing the envelope in the use of plant-based ingredients. Topics as diverse as natural insect repellants, carotenoids for skin brightening and

anti-inflammatory effects of magnolia are explored in the articles contained herein. New cosmetic products in the marketplace are using many food ingredients, such as acai and papain, and other ingredients derived from plants, such as USP salicylic acid made from oil of wintergreen. Glucosides and polyglyceryl esters are replacing ethoxylates and propoxylates in emulsions. Ingredients derived from plants, marine biology, algae, yeasts, enzymes and bacteria are found in many cosmetic products. The opportunities are limited only by the reach of the imagination.

The use of plant ingredients is not new to the current generation of formulators. The protein/fatty acid condensate surfactants were developed shortly after World War II. Their mildness helped inspire Madge the manicurist to soak several generations of clients' fingertips in that famous green dish soap. These types of ingredients, however, have been improved dramatically since those early days. The breakthrough of making amino acids by fermentation instead of hydrolyzing proteins has allowed these dark brown smelly ingredients (remember Potassium Coco-Hydrolyzed Animal Protein?) to evolve into much more elegant, albeit still relatively expensive, surfactants whose use has blossomed in foaming cosmetic cleansers. A mind-boggling array of cosmetic esters has been used by several generations of formulators to produce many elegant effects. One of the articles in this volume, "Bio-based Esters for a Smaller Footprint", shows that a new green frontier exists even for this relatively mature technology.

The growth in the green product category has included the development of various natural and organic standards by governments and private organizations. Some think that it is taking the cosmetics industry forever to develop a system for standardization. It's easy to forget, however, looking over from our industry's paroxysms of passion and strife in this area that it took the food industry decades to achieve their current state of relative peace and harmony. It's also easy to miss the fact that words and concepts like "synthetic" and "nonagricultural", so central to the natural and organic claims of both the food and cosmetic industries, are still adding "spice" to the food industry and creating conflict after almost a decade of government regulation

The organic food industry started from a vision to improve the environmental sustainability of food production and also as a way to increase the value and profit margins of food products. The origins of the movement can be glimpsed as early as the 1920's, when farmers were still selling directly to consumers². As the organic market grew and became more complex, the desire to standardize organic claims led to the development of many private certification standards for food throughout the world. Eventually, government regulation resulted after key principles and practices resulted from these private standards. In the three major markets, the United States, Europe and Japan, organic food claims have been regulated by government standards for about a decade.

The development of cosmetic standards has also been pioneered by the private sector. One of the most widely recognized natural cosmetic standards in Europe was created by BDIH, the Association of German Industries and Trading Firms (www.kontrollierte-naturkosmetik.de/e/index_e.htm), which works in the pharmaceutical, health care, food supplement and cosmetics industries. Ecocert, one of the EU's largest organic food certifiers, also certifies products to a private cosmetic standard (www.ecocert.com/-Cosmetics-.html), created by Cosmebio, another cosmetics industry trade organization. After many years of certifying to this standard, Ecocert led a group of European certifiers in the creation of a new organization called the European Cosmetics Standards Working Group. Their standard, called COSMOS (www.cosmos-standard.org), is in development. NaTrue (www.natrue.org) is the other major player in the European cosmetic standards arena. Originally created to help influence the government in its eventual move to regulate these claims, NaTrue formed an alliance with IKW, the German Cosmetics, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association. Soon after this, the new group (which retained the NaTrue name) announced that it was developing its own standard for organic and natural cosmetics. These two groups, NaTrue and COSMOS, have emerged as the major European forces in the future of natural and organic cosmetic certification.

The US has also seen a great deal of activity in this area. A task force with representation across the industry was adopted by the