

Featured Content

Organic Supplements

Certified organic supplements require extra elbow grease to make but Organix-South offers an inside look at why they are worth the extra effort.

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Nearly every supermarket across the country has recognized the importance of having organic products in its grocery landscape. Nowadays it's common to not only see a vibrant combination of fresh organic produce, but also to see a variety of organic beverages, snack foods and meats as well. Organic supplements have also begun to make distinctive inroads.

Autumn Blum, formulator and CEO, Organix-South, Inc. of Bowling Green, FL, said the increasing clamor for all things organic—including supplements—is rooted in consumers' increased understanding of what "organic" has to offer. "Over the years, consumers have learned that certified organic stands for a high level of commitment to pure and uncontaminated products that have a positive impact on the ecosystems where they are grown," she said. "Once the basic educational foundation was laid by the natural and organic industry and consumers began to realize the difference, the profit

mongers of the mass market jumped in and heralded the arrival of organic as a household word."

Organix-South recently unveiled a range of supercritical whole herb supplements bearing the "Made with Certified Organic Herbs" label—a tagline the USDA only allows when a minimum of 70% of the product's ingredients by weight are certified organic. The line was also awarded the European EcoCert certification, which complies with U.S., European and Asian standards for maintaining certified organic operations from farm to finished product.

Formulated by Organix-South's Medical Advisor Dr. Shrikrishna G. Phadke, PhD, the line known as TheraVeda is a condition-specific set of 12 formulas, which offer the benefits of both supercritical extracts and whole herbs using a patent-pending technology that does not require harmful chemical solvents. Supercritical extraction is a natural process that yields an efficacious herbal extract containing the broadest spectrum of an herb's oils, waxes and resins without synthetic additives and harmful contaminants.

The supplements included in the line are: Aller Support, Joint Support, Respiratory Support, Menopause Support, Headache Support, Heart & Cholesterol Support, Liver Support, Male Vitality, Anti-Oxidant Cellular Support, Night Stress, Day Stress and Women's Hormonal Balance.

All of the company's supercritical extractions are carried out in India by its partners at Nisarga Biotech. For eight years the two companies have shared farmland outside of Pune, India, which was recently EcoCert certified organic. "We source as many of our herbs from our farms as possible. They don't all grow in that region, so we deal with other partner organic farms as well," explained Ms. Blum. The resulting extracts are shipped to the U.S. and assembled by a trusted encapsulator, allowing Organix-South to focus its manufacturing efforts on its body care products, which are manufactured in-house at the Bowling Green facility. "We have started the process to certify that local facility as well, so we can now say that we are 'transitioning' to organic locally," she said.

Labor Intensive Formulating

Harvesting and processing herbal supplement ingredients is an arduous undertaking that is made especially more so when the goal is "certified organic." "It is very labor intensive, but you also become intimately aware of all aspects of the product, including areas that even diligent manufacturers may not track or know about," remarked Ms. Blum. "On the farm, labor is more intensive, as weeding, selection and harvest is done by hand. Once we have the extracts in our manufacturing facility, the automated processes are basically the same. We had to improve our documentation to provide greater internal transparency of all of our herb sources, from seed to soil to finished product."

To comply with Good Manufacturing Practices and for the company's own quality control standards, Organix-South tests all of its herbs at least twice before they are incorporated into a finished product or capsule. "First, every organic herb is tested in our labs in India for botanical identity, strength and purity to assure that they are free of any residues from chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers," she said. "Then, every batch is tested to pharmacopoeial-grade standards in our own in-house lab with both High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GC/MS) testing. This is considered pretty high tech for an in-house lab." She added that this step requires a tremendous amount of time and money but is critical if a company wants to assure its products are of the highest-quality.

Organix-South subjects its products to additional tests visa via a third-party independent lab to confirm the results from its own labs in India and to assure that there are no discrepancies between the two labs. "If the average consumer knew how much went into creating a finished product, I think they would be pleased to know what steps many manufacturers are taking to ensure high-quality supplements," she commented.

Despite the added labor required to attain certified organic status, Ms. Blum says it's all worth it. "I have used herbal extracts for a decade in the manufacture of my TheraNeem products, but a few years ago I realized that concentrating a potentially contaminated

non-organic herb would also concentrate the contaminant," she said. "Using certified organic herbs is more expensive and creates another level of challenges for the people who manage the supply chain and manufacturing. But, by going organic, we now oversee all aspects of our supply chain, literally from farm to capsule. From both a manufacturing and ethical perspective, that is a beautiful thing. Knowing that our products don't contain concentrated contaminants such as a residue from an herbicide, pesticide or chemical fertilizer allows me to sleep well at night."

Topical Endnotes

Trinity Ava, an herbalist with Organix-South, said that like an ordinary supplement, a high-quality organic supplement should still convey a message of something that is healthy and natural, but with an added value of the certification process gives consumers clearly defined quality control standards. "It is relevant to remind ourselves that most herbs sold today are actually wild-crafted versus being cultivated either organically or conventionally," she noted. "In our fast-growing global economy, many people around the world earn their livelihood by wild-crafting herbs in their native environment. These wild-crafted herbs are often of excellent quality and are typically graded for quality when being purchased for an end product. However, the additional cost of organic certification can be cost prohibitive for many wild-crafters."

To improve their own levels of quality control, Organix-South and Nisarga Biotech have worked to certify the forest area where local villagers earn their livelihood by wild-crafting some herbs for the companies' TheraVeda dietary supplements as organic. "This assures that our end product is not only certified organic, but also builds a foundation for sustainable economic development so that both the environment and the people who depend upon it can continue to thrive," she said.

Ms. Ava made two other points regarding certified organic supplements. For starters, ongoing education about the processes is critical. "For instance, some common practices that are used in making herbal dietary supplements may not be user-friendly," she said. "Irradiation is a common form of sterilization for microbial reduction for non-organic culinary herbs and spices, as well as the widely sold herbal dietary supplement Psyllium. Irradiation is not an allowed method of sterilization if an herb or spice is certified organic."

Another misunderstood practice with herbal dietary supplements is standardization. "Most consumers are not aware that a carcinogenic solvent—hexane, a petroleum product also used in gasoline and industrial glue—is used to extract most standardized herbs," Ms. Ava said. "The final standardized extract contains residue from that hexane solvent. While it may not be a concern for all consumers, they need to know that not all herbal products are created equally."

Consumers must also understand that the quality of herbs—and the prices paid for them—can vary dramatically. "A great example is shopping at a farmer's market where you can often purchase organic fruits or vegetables at a discount price if they have a few bruises or blemishes on them," she said. "There are many different grades of herbs sold and the least expensive herbs may not be the best choice for consumers."

She concluded that if customers were better informed about the multitude of choices manufacturers make and their subsequent impact on prices, it would help validate higher retail prices. "As an industry, we all have a lot of teaching to do so our customers understand the real costs involved in creating high-quality organic and laboratory-tested herbal dietary supplements that are sustainable for our customers, the people who grow the herbs and our planet."

"Helping grow the organic category and supplying quality information about the benefits of certified organic products requires a group effort," agreed Ms. Blum. "We need all of our voices to harmonize on why organic is not the wave of the future, but a way we can all vote with our wallets every day and demand quality products that should be the rule, rather than a 'fringe' or alternative item."

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