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IS YOUR SKIN CARE SUSTAINABLE?

BY MARK WUTTKE

OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE increased demand for natural and organic personal care products has resulted in more green companies and products. The good news is that consumers have more choices than ever before.

Beyond just the ingredients and packaging, companies also need to consider how to minimize their impact on the environmental resources from which they harvest their products. For decades chemical and petroleum-based methods were utilized to meet continuing demand. What are the ways that companies can build a regenerative process to ensure that the products we create are not only safe, effective and responsible, but sustainable in the long run?

Acquiring a basic understanding about what you are buying not only ensures that you actually get what you pay for, it also sends a message to companies that transparency and honesty are an essential part of doing business. In short, only informed consumers can demand the quality and transparency that guides us all toward a more honest and healthy future.

In recent years, we have seen skin care companies embrace the concept of "sustainability" in their marketing material. Their attention to this idea has largely been driven by consumer demand and rising expectations. It is a great example of how consumers can play a very powerful role to affect positive change in an industry.

While there are certainly skin care companies that genuinely care about sustainability and the effect their products have on the environment and people's health, many others are simply chasing the trend, and in their case the cart is clearly leading the horse.

This can be seen in their "outside-in" approach to sustainability. In other words, the most immediate changes we have seen have been external to the actual product: recyclable and biodegradable packaging, non-virgin shipping materials, charitable donations and forestry stewardship programs. And while any step toward a safer, greener future is a positive one, the real change needs to happen in the bottle, by fundamentally changing the way prod-

ucts are formulated and how the raw ingredients are grown. Bottom line, a product cannot merely be "green by association." True sustainability happens on the farm.

When we think of the word "farm," many of us imagine an idyllic landscape akin to the setting of *Charlotte's Web*, the classic tale by E.B. White. Rolling hills, changing with the seasons under the care of capable, intuitive hands that not only work upon the land but *with* the land as well to produce the bounty of the earth.

Of course, the reality of modern agriculture more resembles a factory—mechanical, chemical and cash oriented. The benefits of industrial farming have been tremendous. These include:

- Massive crop yields
- Genetically modified pest-resistant plants
- Highly effective pesticides
- Tremendous flexibility of growing regions
- An ability to grow the same crops continually without letting the earth "fallow"

The cons, unfortunately, are far greater, and essentially all come down to the use (or lack of use) of chemicals to enhance growth. After all, even products that are plant-based often require chemicals to produce. Some of the many negatives to conventional growing are:

- The petrochemical-based fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs are in finite supply.
- They damage ecosystems even as they boost them.
- Industrial farming displaces the farming communities that are

rooted in traditional farming, and their expertise is lost.

- Waste runoff from agriculture is the single largest source of water pollutants.
- Overuse of irrigation causes water scarcity, an increasingly alarming global issue.

When faced with a choice between achieving long or short-term goals, most people and companies will make

the expedient choice. However, as public awareness and interest in the social and health benefits of organic products has skyrocketed, we have shifted toward an economic environment that encourages the use of better methods of production, including:

- Sustaining the economic viability of farming communities and enhancing quality of life.

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- Enhancing environmental quality through long-term nurturing of the land rather than short-term exploitation.
- Maximizing plant efficacy and crop yields through a better understanding of ideal growing regions and conditions.
- Finding natural ways to address fertilization and pest control.
- Utilizing scientific advances and studies to partner with the earth and its farming communities, rather than pushing them beyond their sustainable capacity.

The great news is that we have already done ourselves a tremendous service as a culture by voting for organic and natural products with our dollars. But if we are to succeed at reversing the trend of unsustainable farming, we will only do so by continually demanding that companies raise their standards,

and choosing their products when they do. We also need to apply these same standards to the entire life-cycle of the product, from production to packaging to delivery to consumer to recycling. Because when we choose to invest in truly sustainable products, we are investing in a truly sustainable future. ■

Mark Wuttke heads the Wuttke Group, LLC, a world class business development team with a focus on sustainable luxury, spas, boutique retail, and the emerging eco-chic category. Wuttke works closely with *Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS)* and the *Green Spa Network*. Learn more about the Wuttke Group at www.wuttkegroup.com.



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