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### At Home

#### Pg 34 - Ask the Organic Beauty Expert

Your inner and outer beauty questions answered.

By Mary Beth Janssen

One of the questions in last month's column came from a reader who was confused about the proliferation of organic certifications. She asked if we could shed any light on the differences, and we addressed this with the promise of a lengthier "part two." Because of the enormity and the timeliness of this topic, we've dedicated the entire column to this issue, and, as promised, here you have it.

This brings to mind what a dear mentor, Deepak Chopra is fond of saying, "We're all doing the best we can from the level of consciousness we're in." In the personal care certification world, there are certainly varying levels of consciousness as pertains to this. None is "right" or "wrong," but rather all at differing points along a "continuum"-as expressed by Tara Grodjesk, president of Tara Spa Therapy, and a true guiding light in our quest for sustainable, healthy, personal care products. She's a founding board member with the Green Spa Network and co-chair of its advisory group involved in drafting buying guidelines for choosing high-quality natural and organic products for its member spas. The group is in the midst of writing the chapter for its toolkit (for green spa members), on product ingredients, formulations, and labeling. We'll certainly all benefit from this initiative.

Yes, we're all traveling along this arc toward the same destination, and one would hope that ultimately we'll reach a collective consciousness on the certification issue. Ultimately, the certification bodies, although variable are all moving forward in a positive direction. And although at this past May's Natural Beauty Summit in New York, the certification bodies in attendance did not emerge as one unified voice, hopefully, a high-level panel discussion addressed the possibility of global harmonization for natural and organic standards. So perhaps the seeds have been planted. Organic, of course! But for now, my dear readers-since first addressing this in the fall issue-the certification landscape is still evolving. So, here's the scoop.

Although there's progress, confusion remains in organic and natural personal care labeling and certification-especially with an estimated 80 percent of products currently marketed in the United States as organic or natural not having the required amount of organic and natural ingredients. And unless those involved can sort out these ambiguities, the subject of what is natural, organic, and sustainable may have to be sorted out in court. This has actually come to fruition when in late April a high-profile organic player in the United States market, Dr. Bronners's Magic Soaps together with the Organic Consumers Association filed a lawsuit against certification bodies and personal care players alike to highlight this kind of shortfall-especially the misuse and abuse of the word organic, including "organic" products that have been tested and found to contain carcinogenic ingredients. Defending companies have countered that the lawsuit is mainly aimed at the government's lack of action to settle standards issues, and assert that open dialogue-not litigation-is the best way to develop meaningful standards. We'll keep you updated on this one.

Now for the standards themselves. As we go to press, the harmonized EU standards which were to release this past June have yet to do so. These eagerly awaited standards aim to give natural and organic cosmetic products uniform logos for the first time, cutting out the plethora of certification programs and accompanying logos that consumers have found confusing. These certification programs include the Soil Association (United Kingdom), Ecocert (France), BDIH (Germany), and AIAB (Italy). The successful implementation of these standards could pave the way for EU regulations for natural and organic cosmetics, similar to those for organic foods. Again, we'll keep you posted as these harmonized standards release.

In the meantime, NaTrue, a lobby group of the leading European natural cosmetics companies-and pioneers in the natural and organic space we might add-(Lavera/Lavera, Logocos/Logona, Primavera, Santaverde, WALA/Dr. Hauschka, and Weleda) has now published its own criteria and definitions for natural and organic cosmetics, which offer a comprehensive standard for a unified European labelling system. The group's aim is to achieve transparency and consistency with regard to the composition and quality of natural and organic cosmetics on a European level.

The definitions which can be accessed on the website [www.natrue.eu](http://www.natrue.eu) form the basis for a label with three grades and cover the ingredients allowed and their minimum and maximum proportion of the contents. Some industry experts see this as a quality standard that's coming on strong in view of the harmonized EU standards not yet being out.

In the United States, The **USDA NOP** - a third party certifier of organic agricultural product/ingredients and processes-is considered by many to be the "gold standard" in terms of organic certification for personal care products (although not created for this purpose-to certify finished personal care product) There's no room for compromise in the USDA standards as pertains to

organic. For eco-visionaries like Horst Rechelbacher, founder of Aveda and the newly launched Intelligent Nutrients brand (carrying the USDA seal) this served as the impetus to source, formulate, process, and deliver one of the purest products in the personal care realm. And one might add, an efficacious and aromatic one at that- no small feat-given the USDA's stringency. A number of manufacturers either have or are striving to obtain the USDA seal, whether across their brand, or on a few products where possible. Many will simply not compromise and see no problem with applying the NOP standard to personal care products. "The NOP is perfectly workable," says Diana Kaye, co-owner and co-founder of Terresentials, a USDA-certified organic personal care company. "There are a number of companies that could comply with the USDA standard, but it's cheaper and more profitable not to." However, let me emphasize that the USDA seal does not always a successful product make. Elegant formulation is key-a fact not lost on Horst as he formulated with great care with food and cosmetic chemists to get it right. It bears mention here that some USDA-certified personal care products in the marketplace have fallen short in view of product performance and quality such as aroma, viscosity, and stability.

Another high-quality organic standard is NSF International's ([www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org)) which will release by the end of this year. A trusted third party certifier, NSF has just completed a second round of public comment on its standards draft (NSF Draft Standard 305: Organic Personal Care Products). The group has developed a fully organic standard comparable to the USDA's, along with a "made with" organic standard that allows an excellent entry point for manufacturers moving in an organic direction to become certified. The Organic Trade Association ([www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)) as well as industry representatives the likes of David Bronner, President of Dr. Bronner Soaps, which produces USDA-certified organic soap, have been involved in the development of the NSF's standards.

The Organic and Sustainable Industry Standards (OASIS) ([www.oasisseal.org](http://www.oasisseal.org)) a standard released by a trade group (not a third party certifier) that includes manufacturers like Aveda, Hain Celestial, as well as industry giants Estee Lauder and L'Oreal, has also taken a seat at the table. Some industry experts are touting this as a good standard. They set out two levels of certification: organic and "made with" organic, and set goals for increasing the required percentage of organic ingredients in its certified organic products over the next several years.

The purpose of the gradual changes allows manufacturers time to adapt and let the supply of organic ingredients catch up to the demand. "It's a compromise, but I think it's necessary to let the market mature," says Gay Timmons, chairwoman of OASIS and owner of Los Gatos, California-based Oh, Oh Organics.

The challenge in some quarters is seen as OASIS's ability to regulate/enforce

the standard (since the standards are made and enforced by its members). Also, organic industry experts are calling on parent company's Estee Lauder and L'Oreal to get on board with the standard and start making changes in their mass market brands in the areas of sustainability, health, and safety. In Bronner's view, OASIS is an acceptable standard for natural personal care products but not strong enough for organic certification, because it allows the hydration and sulfation of ingredients, as well as some synthetic preservatives.

Moving along, also worth mention is the Canadian environmental, health, and food safety standards certification firm Certech Registration ([www.certechregistration.com](http://www.certechregistration.com)) that began offering the Certech natural and organic certification for cosmetics in 2008.

Released May, 2008, The Natural Product Association's natural seal ([www.thenaturalseal.org](http://www.thenaturalseal.org)) will be in circulation by the time you read this. It is seen as a high-quality standard requiring 95 percent natural ingredients and includes stringent requirements relative to sustainability, health, and safety related issues.

Not a natural and organic standard per se, but rather buying guidelines for high-level sustainability, health, and safety in personal care products-Whole Foods has launched its new Premium Body Care Standard, a seal awarded to 1,200-plus products and counting that are sold in its stores. Whole Foods has collaborated with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics ([www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org)) to develop buying guidelines and safety criteria for chemically clean and ethically produced skin care. Products with the seal do not contain 250-plus problematic chemicals-including ones that are proven or suspected to be carcinogenic, endocrine disrupting, and allergenic. ([www.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com)) Interestingly, Mark Wuttke-who I consulted with for this column-is providing us all with a high-caliber means to "demystify" the organic and natural standards and certification landscape with his GNOSS initiative. Mark-on the editorial board here at Organic Spa Magazine-heads the Wuttke Group, a world-class business development team with a focus on sustainable wellness, lifestyle spa, boutique retail, organic luxury, and the emerging category of eco-chic. He's also intimately involved in working with the Green Spa Network and collaboration with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

"There's a lot of incongruence at the moment where people are focusing purely on the physical, and I understand that for many that's the only way they can get their head around things, but I also like to look at a company's intent-even though I subscribe to total purity, traceability, and transparency, at the end of the day, I look at the intent. We're looking at the leadership, and the intent associated with it to show where there's an embedded uniqueness in the DNA of the business toward sustainability and health as opposed to just a marketing ploy trying to cash in on current market trends. This issue is there. Personal care product companies will become certified to one of the standards, but my question to them is 'what is your standard?' And that's but

one of the reasons we've created the Global Natural and Organic Skincare and Cosmetic Certification Standards (GNOSS) in partnership with Australia's RMIT University. We set out to demystify through research and survey for the purpose of collecting data on a broad range of parameters in an attempt to determine the scope and depth of sustainability for each of the global certification standards for natural and organic skincare and cosmetics. Vendor and customer alike can use this resource."

"Given the current debate around cosmetic standards at the moment, it is timely for the organic and natural cosmetic certification processes to show the public their work and how it protects their safety. The research involves an extensive questionnaire on the environmental, health, and workplace dimensions of sustainability, with the goal being to develop a simple and transparent guide to communicate the key elements in the range of global certification standards through a database and matrix. GNOSS is available for review at [www.wuttkegroup.com](http://www.wuttkegroup.com) and at the Green Spa Network as of October. GNOSS will be a live document, ongoing because standards are improving on a daily basis."

"We'll also be creating a matrix/guide that contrasts the ingredients/processes of certified versus conventional cosmetics for the purposes of communicating the extensive safety and sustainability gaps between the systems." Ah, sweet clarity. Thank you, Mark. Stay tuned for further updates, dear readers.

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