

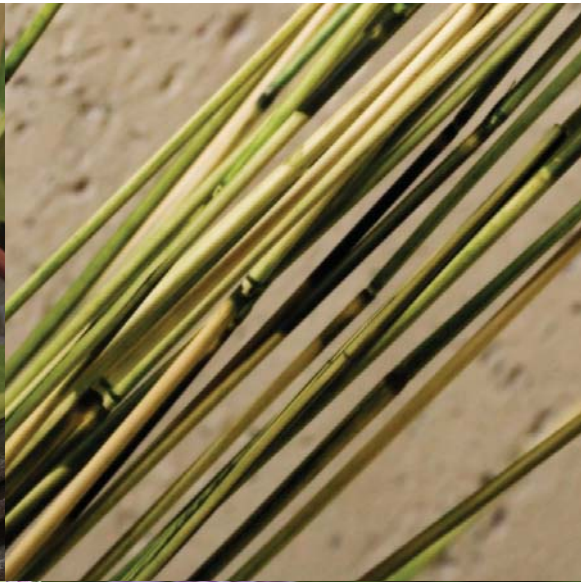
PART II

THE *Organic* MOVEMENT

Following the Rules to a Sustainable Future

BY JULIE WILSON

In the last issue of *Pulse*, we cracked open the door to look into the world of organics and its role in the spa industry. Behind that door looms a cryptic menagerie of questions, costs and claims. However, to the rescue have come several devoted trailblazers working to make the world of organics less ominous.



Standard Issue

The cliffhanger from part I of our series on organics (July 2006) eluded to what is presumably the most debated topic within the world of organic product manufacturing today: labeling. Think of the label as a contract between consumer and manufacturer – “We promise that the ingredients listed on the back of this bottle are what actually made it into the product.” And to make sure that U.S.-based companies abide by this “contract,” the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (overseen by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration) requires that labels be truthful and not misleading, in addition to making sure all the ingredients are safe.

Safe, yes. But are they organic? This is a rather gray area, with no communal regulation in place. For instance, Germany has stringent standards in place when it comes to certifying organic products. When it comes specifically to organic body care products, the United States has no standards set.

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements is the umbrella organization for the worldwide organic movement, representing 750 member organizations in 108 countries. IFOAM created the International Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing, but as stated on their Web site these guidelines are “intended to guide governments and private certification bodies in standard setting,” which means they have no policing power.

For many companies working with organic ingredients, especially U.S.-based companies, they look to IFOAM’s standards as a guide. For instance, Anne M. Dolbeau, founder and CEO of Wild Earth Inc./Inara, works with a cooperative in Brazil to find babassu oil for her body care products. Products from this cooperative are certified by Instituto Biodinâmico (IBD), a Brazilian certifying body that reports directly to IFOAM. Dolbeau’s goal for 2007 is to have her company’s finished products certified directly by IFOAM so other countries will recognize their organic status.



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However, there is a group in the United States working on developing definitive standards for organic body care products in this country. For about five years, Tim Kapsner, senior research scientist at Aveda, has been part of a committee working on standards for the personal care industry. Following in the footsteps of the organic food industry, the plan is to develop standards for personal body

care products, put them into play (to make sure they work as intended) then have the U.S. FDA take over the program to enforce the standards.

Kapsner and Aveda have a strong body of knowledge behind them to help develop these standards. In 1996, with the launch of its new Sensitive Body line, Aveda wanted to have the product certified organic – 10 years ago, the standards for certifying organic body care products were that much further behind. So instead of waiting, they applied for the product to be certified organic under the food standards, and it’s been certified ever since.

Kapsner’s committee, which works with the American National Standards Institute, will use the food industry’s guidelines as a basis for creating organic standards for the personal

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care industry. "What we see here is the merging of two different industries: food and cosmetics," said Kapsner. "The interface between two industries is a complex one, which is why it's taken so long. But to see us now finally merging, to see the potential, that's what's been driving me for a while." The committee is hoping to have a draft for review in October, in time for their meeting at Natural Products Expo East.

So why make such an investment? "It's worth it to us because of what organic means in the marketplace," said Kapsner. "It means sustainability. We have to be thinking about what's going to happen 10 years, 100 years, 1,000 years from now. The raw materials we use are not going to be around forever, so we have to look at things that are renewable. Organic is one carefully defined avenue to improving the sustainability of ingredients in your products."

Enabling the Label

Marketers pay a great deal of attention to what goes on the front of a bottle of shampoo or a pod of face cream. But what's on the back is of equal importance. The list of ingredients is where the term "organic" makes its value known, and many companies are heralding that claim by the slimmest of margins. "The complication now is that companies are trumpeting the fact that their product is organic when they may only contain a sprinkling of an herb," said Kapsner.

So which products get to make the claim, and which ones don't? To use the official USDA Organic seal (see sample), here is a quick breakdown of their guidelines:

- Products labeled as "100 percent organic" must contain (excluding water and salt) only organically produced ingredients.
- Products labeled "organic" must consist of at least 95 percent organically produced ingredients (excluding water and salt). Any remaining product ingredients must consist of nonagri-

cultural substances approved on the National List or non-organically produced agricultural products that are not commercially available in organic form.

- Processed products that contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients can use the phrase "made with organic ingredients" and list up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups on the principal display panel.

But because these guidelines were created with food rather than personal care products in mind, it's really fuzzy science when using these labeling methods for products marketed to the spa industry. "A percentage of [ingredients] can be non-organic and those could be not nice ingredients," said Mark Wuttke, principal of Wuttke Group, LLC, and formerly with organic product staple Jurlique. "Just 1 or 2 percent of the ingredients don't have to be labeled and they could be the nastiest substance around."

Wuttke, who spent a great deal of his life in Australia, explained that that country has tighter organic labeling laws. "For instance, if it was genetically modified foods, it had to be disclosed," he said. "I don't think in the United States that we know what we're consuming."

He is on board with a self-regulatory model for organic labeling in the personal care industry. "I think this type of

model, which is transparent and authentic, will give consumers the most confidence. As the consumer becomes more sophisticated, it won't matter what is put on the label – they will ultimately become the regulator."

Educating the Educator

"It's hard to tell the story [of a product] through a catalog," said Dolbeau. "The beautiful thing about spas is they're a place you can actually experience the products." This makes spas the perfect medium for organic education.

But before spas can pass along information on the benefits of organic body care to the consumer, they first must become

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proficient in the knowledge. "For the spa industry, the next step is understanding what to look for," advised Tara Grodjesk, founder of Tara Spa Therapy. And it's already happening she says, as more therapists are asking what's in the product and becoming more discerning.

A little education goes a long way according to Robin Brown, co-founder of Ervaviva. "Most people who come to the ISPA [Conference & Expo] are very well educated in some way or another about products. Some may not have extended that into organics, but they will if they want to stay ahead of the game."

Right now, Kapsner advises spas to look to the reputation of the company when buying organic products. "They have to resort to the integrity of the companies they're dealing with," he said. "Spa people just have to know the company."

For Jenny Helling, spa director at Spa Mystique in the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza in Los Angeles, the company she invested in turned out to be a one-woman show. She met Debra Kelly, owner of Old Orchard Herb Farm, while working at Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch, and incorporated some of her organic ingredients into a treatment. "I love

her philosophy of using ingredients that are indigenous to the specific area," said Helling. "Scrubs are a dime a dozen, but if you can say yours uses special ingredients found in the local area, then it gives you more of a story."

More than just a story, though, Helling feels it adds to the spa experience for the client. "Spa guests benefit in the sense that the components of the scrub offer a more pure and detoxifying experience," she said. So pure, in fact, that the ingredients of the scrub can substitute for a light snack. "The key thing with Debra's [organic ingredients] is if you can't put them in your mouth, they shouldn't be massaged into the body," she said.

And coincidentally, Kelly uses a pastry bag to pump her blackberry balm into thousands of jars, one by one, by hand. "It's not fast," she admitted, "but I know it's going onto people's bodies, so I just feel good about doing it this way."

Worth the Investment

The good part is that spas won't have to attract a new market of clientele who are interested in organics. "We in the spa industry have been catering to that market but didn't really know it," said Wuttke.

Emma Spencer, spa treatment manager at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa in Sonoma, Calif., is already maximizing this approach. "Because we're in a resort spa, clients often come in for a more corporate setting, so we bring the holistic approach to them. We created a whole environment for them based on the way we live life here in Northern California." She does this through their ayurvedic line, which includes several organic ingredients.

This consumer is also willing to pay for the organic experience. Wuttke believes it is the uprising of the sect known as Cultural Creatives that will continue to advance the organic movement. "They look at things from an environmental perspective, and they look for natural and organic."

As the Organic Trade Association points out, the organic market has seen double-digit growth over the past decade, moving it beyond a temporary distraction. "I think over a decade of solid growth definitely moves it beyond fad," said Holly Givens, communications director for the OTA. So with the consumer actively looking for organic products, the only question that remains is whether the spa industry is giving them something to look at. As Wuttke asked, "The client has money in their wellness wallet. Is your spa getting its share?" ■

