

# PULSE

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## *The* DIRT *on* ORGANICS

COMPANIES STAY TRUE  
TO THE ROOTS OF  
THE GREEN MOVEMENT



  
15<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
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# *Organically* INCLINED

The Spa Industry Takes on a Greener Shade

BY JULIE WILSON

“

It's hard for the consumer to know what it all means," said Robin Brown, co-founder of Ervaviva. "The more you know, the harder it is to figure out what's going on."

Such is the general feeling from those in the know of (and those trying to understand) the idiosyncrasies of organics. As we do with all articles in *Pulse*, we began extensive research into the topic of organics to bring you some insight into this niche market. But like rabbits' infamous multiplication skills, the topic of organics has a way of compounding the further you dive into it.

All of the information we discovered has generated the need for a two-part feature on organics; the second part will appear in the August issue. As we all continue to learn about this relevant trend, we will bring you further updates into the world of organics. Enjoy this first installment.

## The Spirit of Organics

It's easy to recognize how organics complement the spa industry. The intent of those who manufacture them is to offer a clean, environmentally friendly alternative (at least that was the motivation in the earlier days before the label became a marketing tool, but we'll get to that in part II of the series). And not only does the consumer reap the benefits, so does the environment. In fact, the two partner in the ultimate tango – each offering the other the essential life force needed.

“One of the strongest and well-documented benefits is environmental,” said Holly Givens, communications director for the Organic Trade Association. “The challenge is reminding people that they are an intimate part of the environment and the environment is a part of them. It doesn't always leap up for people as being a part of themselves, but it is. The air you breathe and the water you drink, those have to be healthy or you won't be. It's kind of as simple as that.”

And on the surface, the spirit of organics is simple: extract pure ingredients from the earth, ingest or absorb natural products into the body and everyone wins. But herein lies the conundrum – what exactly does “pure” and “natural” mean?

## Classifying Ingredients

### Just Isn't Natural

During the fat-free craze of the '90s, predominantly in the United States, such terms as “light” and “lite” donned many a jar of mayonnaise and ice cream in response to consumer demand. What do these terms mean? At first, no one knew, which meant manufacturers had free reign to plaster them all over their product labels.

Enter the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In 1993, this government body began regulating the use of these nutrition claims on food labels.

The organics industry is experiencing a similar challenge with the use of such terms as “pure,” “natural,” and yes, even its namesake “organic.”

Tara Grodjesk, whose eponymous Tara Spa Therapy company produces a 21-variety aromatherapy collection, is fluent in the issue of defining ingredients. “You can clearly define organic food and organic textiles, but you cannot define organic skin care or body products,” she said. “The requirements are loose.”

For example, lavender can be grown without the use of pesti-



cides, but the soil in which it grows has to be tested to be certified organic. “So we say our oils are pesticide-free, but we can only certify 11 of the 21 we have as standard certified organic,” said Grodjesk.

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She admits it's a sacrifice (“We do have to make compromises, we've had to.”) but the philosophical foundation of organics just cannot be compromised for those who truly believe in what it stands for. “I won't put organic on the label unless we purchase oils that are standard certified organic,” she said, despite the fact that the word “organic” on a label has become eye candy for many consumers. “‘Organic’ is the next buzzword and has huge marketing appeal,” Grodjesk admitted. “We know it has draw, but we're trying to be very careful about it.”

Good thing because many other organic-based companies are adamant about keeping the definition of “organic” true to its roots, though what that definition is continues to be debated.

“To be truly 100 percent organic means you can have no water [in the product]. If you have water, you must have a preservative because water breeds bacteria,” explained Anne M. Dolbeau, founder and CEO of Wild Earth Inc./Inara. “Some people say that's not true, but ...”

She's right, some people do say that. In fact, one of those “people” is the aforementioned OTA. The rules they advocate are those



Anne M. Dolbeau (opposite page - right, and below right), founder and CEO of Wild Earth Inc./Inara, literally trudded through the rainforests of Brazil to find organic ingredients for her company's body care products. (Left) A Brazilian local helps Dolbeau harvest babassu oil.



established by the National Organic Standards Board; the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program oversees the program. (The regulations are different around the globe, and we'll get into those in the second installment of our series on organics.)

Givens explained the OTA's stance when it comes to water. "Water, because it's not an agricultural product, doesn't count in the way you figure out what percentage of ingredients are organic." She then proceeded to offer this example: "If a product is made with organic aloe vera and you're adding water to that aloe vera, the water you would add wouldn't count as organic."

Silence ensued. There was definite confusion in the mind of this writer, and she could sense that. It's obvious this question has come up a lot with her organization.

"The rules are confusing around personal care products," admitted Givens. "The rules were developed mostly thinking about food. They didn't have the imagination to see that agriculture products were not just for food – they could be clothing wear, turned into plastics, a lot of things."

And in the minds of some, being organic isn't the end of the line. "Being organic is one thing and being high quality is another," said Brown. "Being certified organic says one thing, but it doesn't say it's the best quality you can get."

With these challenges, organic-based companies are instead telling the story of their products in other ways.

Dolbeau has quite the story to share and the climactic chapter takes place in the rainforests of Brazil. If you didn't know her, you might picture her as a backpacking, machete-wielding naturalist who's just as much at home in a palm-lined hut as in a bricked house. You would be wrong.

"My idea of camping is a hotel with no room service," said Dolbeau, completely deadpan. As serious as she is about her choice of accommodations, she's that much more dedicated to finding the best organic ingredients for her company's products.

In July 1999, Dolbeau took over a fledgling company "that had basically gone to funk" and turned it into a successful personal care products company. Unaware of some of the obstacles she would face, she decided to make the trek to Brazil in 2000 to get a firsthand look at the organically derived babassu oil she uses in her product line.

Not only was she pleased with the oil, but she went one step further and established a Fair Trade agreement with the local cooperative that's harvesting the oil for her company. Going one step further – that's the beauty of true organic companies; their motivation is not just profit (though who doesn't want that?) but to offer consumers something that's authentic and earth-friendly. "We're going back to nature and finding what it is we can take right out of our own environment," said Dolbeau. "You're not putting anything synthetic on your body; you can use products from nature by nature."

## The Organic Consumer

*Au natural* was a popular sentiment in the '60s and early '70s. During these years, when organics really made a name for themselves outside of the farmers' markets, many consumers and producers of said organics were the hippies – a term originally used to describe some of the defiant youth of these eras. Hippies expressed a desire for change, and one way to do this was by renouncing anything corporate; they adopted organic farming to bypass big business.

This group is becoming less of a subculture and closer to the norm as their sentiments become common practice for many consumers, including some "former hippies" who are now the ones in the offices of larger corporations. "You may see me wearing a blue pinstripe suit, but what gives me away that I'm still a hippie is my tie and shoes," joked Mark Wuttke, principal of the newly established Wuttke Group, LLC, and formerly with organic product staple Jurlique. "[The corporate world] is not going to erode the essence of who I am."

That essence seems to be permeating through a large faction

of the population. According to a report by the U.S. Market for Organic Foods and Beverages, the sale of organic foods and beverages rose 1,000 percent between 1990 and 2002. If you gasped at that statistic, look at this one: in the 2005 Whole Foods Market Organic Foods Trend Tracker survey, 65 percent of Americans said they had tried organic foods and beverages, with the No. 1 reason being to avoid pesticides.

True, both of these statistics revolve around food and beverages, but it's a start. "Fruits and vegetables, dairy products are gateway products to organic," said Givens. Just as periphery spa-goers often use manicures and pedicures as their foray into the spa experience, beans and canned tomatoes make it easy for consumers to dip their toes into the waters of organics.

Givens also said that a life-changing experience is often the catalyst for many to look into shopping organically. "A reason people first start using organic is a health event in the family, like having a baby," she said.

This is exactly the vehicle that led Brown and his wife to create

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## organics

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Erbaviva. “Our whole gravitation to organic foods and products all came from researching for our baby,” said Brown. “Once you get to the stage of having children, what was not a focus previously starts now.” So out of the birth of their child, Erbaviva was born.

A new life, at present untainted and pure, deserves only those products that embody that purity. Such is the attitude of many consumers, including the Browns. So in 1998, they set out to create their own baby products because nothing lived up to their standards. When their friends started clamoring for the products, they knew they were onto something. Today, it’s the company’s dedication to ingredient analysis that puts them at the forefront. “We leave no stone unturned,” said Brown. “When we use an ingredient in our products, we look at all aspects of it. Every ingredient has a whole story behind it.”

Susie Wang’s story opens with a dramatic scene. As the founder of Aqua Dessa and 100% Pure, Wang had a jewel of a company that attracted a lot of attention. In fact, the third largest cosmetics company in the world came courting her to acquire her company.

The wheels were set in motion, so Wang went to work in their lab during the acquisition phase. “I knocked over a product on the lab table, and about 10-15 minutes later, the ingredient had rippled the table,” she said. “This ingredient was in virtually every product we made.”

This significant event threw up a red flag for Wang who began to research ingredients and their effects on the skin. “Because of that [event], we decided we would develop a line that is totally pure, organic and free of toxins.”

Wang achieved her mission with the creation of 100% Pure and Aqua Dessa, whose product line touts a Chocolate Espresso Body Scrub. Sounds good enough to eat ... and its label asserts that it is!

Which brings us to one of the major hurdles (and debates) in the manufacturing and marketing of organics – labeling and product claims. It is so major, in fact, that it will be the segue into the second installment of our look into the world of organics. Stay tuned! ■

**JULIE WILSON**, the executive editor of *Pulse*, is an organic consumer from way back, but even she was frazzled by all of the information on this niche market. Don't throw your hands up in frustration – we'll explore more next time, and it'll all become crystal clear.

