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OrganicProcessing

Strategies for Best Practices in Food, Fiber and Personal Care

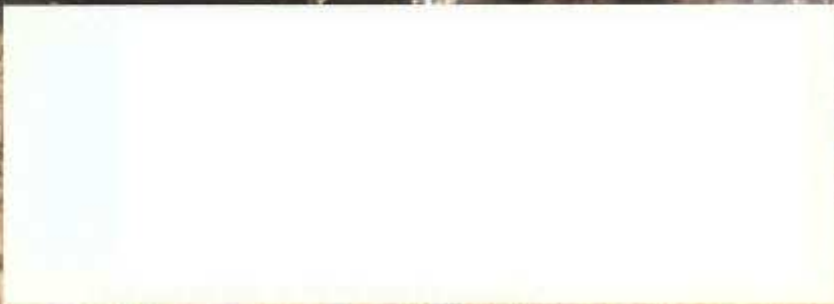
Success in 2020: Six Key Questions to Ask Now

Aubrey Organics' Authentic Beauty

Nature's Path's Journey to Sustainability

Formulating with Fair Trade Ingredients

Creative Product Concepting



No Cover Up Needed:

Aubrey Organics Brings Out the Personal Care Industry's Natural, Authentic Beauty

By Kat Schuett

Within 24 hours, the average woman uses 12 personal care products containing a total of 160 different synthetic chemicals, according to a survey from the Environmental Working Group.

Aubrey Hampton's goal is to get that 160 down to zero. "I want to see every personal care item have a natural or organic alternative."



Often called the father of natural and organic personal care, Hampton was one of the first industry voices to speak out against the use of petrochemicals and other harmful synthetics in beauty products, and over the years he has authored several books on the subject. When he founded Aubrey Organics in 1967, it was the first commercial personal care manufacturer to disclose all ingredients on the back panel. Later, he pushed the FDA to require all personal care companies to do the same.

In 1994, Aubrey Organics became the first personal care manufacturer to have a certified organic processing facility—creating the first third-party certified organic beauty products before the National Organic Program (NOP) was even developed. After the NOP was established these products were the first to voluntarily undergo certification to earn the USDA Organic seal.

While Hampton was working to establish authenticity in organic personal care, however, others took advantage of the lack of official regulation and many products hit the market claiming "organic" that didn't contain any organic ingredients. Even worse, many of these actually contained harmful synthetics and known carcinogens. To call attention to

this, in 1996 Hampton submitted a 50-page citizen's petition to the USDA detailing over 250 chemicals that should not be allowed in personal care products labeled "organic." Despite efforts like this by Hampton and others, the organic personal care industry is still in need of a makeover.

In a recent effort to reign in unsubstantiated organic claims, last summer both Whole Foods Market and the Organic Trade Association took a stance in support of NOP regulation of organic personal care. To do its part to help quiet confusion over what "organic" means in the personal care marketplace, Aubrey Organics has taken the lead again. Although the company has used the brand name "Aubrey Organics" for over 50 years—long before the NOP was even a consideration—the company was recently the first to announce that it

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will be removing the word "organic" from the front label of anything that is not certified to the NOP or NSF 305 "contains organic" standards—two of the most stringent standards for organic personal care. The company hopes that this will encourage other companies to follow suit.

In the meantime, Hampton and his team are busy leading in innovation as well—proving that you don't need petrochemicals to look pretty, and that natural, authentic beauty is always best.

Formulating with Nature

Why use something synthetic when something natural works so much better? The fact that so many companies insist on using chemicals when they don't need to has always made Hampton scratch his head. An herbalist with a Ph.D. in organic chemistry, Hampton started off working for several major conventional corporations. But with a father who was an organic farmer and a mother who made her own natural cosmetics, Hampton's ideals clashed with his employers who, like all major cosmetic companies, were in the habit of relying on petrochemicals and other known carcinogenic synthetics. "I would make natural products and no matter how great it already worked, they always wanted to add chemicals to everything," he says.

After discovering more about the harmful effects of some of these chemicals, he decided to go off on his own and started mixing up natural and organic personal care concoctions in his kitchen. His approach was to search out the best in nature and bring these items together in a natural synergy. Hampton's philosophy was that any time you added something synthetic to the mix in order to achieve better functionality that was "forced synergy."

Working with natural and as many organic ingredients as possible, Hampton has used his understanding of na-

ture's own chemistry, combined with minimal processing, to create over 250 natural and/or organic certified products that he says work as well or better than the synthetic versions. These products range from cleansers and anti-aging creams to Aubrey Organics' latest new product release: NuStyle USDA Organic-certified hair styling products made with quinoa protein.

Discovering Breakthrough Ingredients

Rather than spending time trying to force synergy with chemicals, Aubrey Organics instead searches for natural ingredients that already contain inherent functionality. Take quinoa protein, for instance—Aubrey's developers noticed the natural stickiness in the protein, and thought, "What can we use this for...what about hairspray?" This kind of thinking has led to all sorts of breakthrough ingredient discoveries, many of which have been spotlighted in the media, including hundreds of magazine mentions and features on shows such as Dr. Oz. The conventional personal care industry has even latched on to many of these natural solutions, incorporating them into their product formulations. Some of the ingredients that Aubrey Organics was responsible for bringing to market include: jojoba oil (1972), grapefruit extract and antioxidant preservative (1974), Rosa Mosqueta rose hip seed oil (1986), herbal gums and vitamin B5 (1988), natural fruit acids (1990), matcha green tea (1995), blue green algae and grape seed extract (1999), sea buckthorn oil and topical ester C (1999).

Animal Activism

Besides being a leader in organic and natural personal care, in the early '90s Aubrey Organics was also one of first manufacturers to earn the official bunny logo from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, symbolizing its commitment to cruelty-free personal care. Today, this seal is governed by the Coalition for Consumer Information in Cosmetics, a group of eight national animal protection organizations. Hampton was also named "Activist of the Year" in 1990 by the Culture and Animals Foundation.



One of the ingredients Hampton is most proud of is Rosa Mosqueta, an oil made from the seeds of rose hips. A friend who was doing research in South America told him how the natives used the oil from a rare rose that grew in the Andes Mountains to rejuvenate their skin. They called it Rosa Mosqueta, or "rose face." The researcher sent before and after pictures that truly impressed Hampton, and soon samples arrived in a hollowed-out gourd. After seeing the results for himself, he incorporated the ingredient into several of his products, and numerous other manufacturers have followed, calling it just rose hip seed oil ("Rosa Mosqueta" is trademarked by Aubrey Organics). Hampton also worked with the Women of Wisdom cooperative, which harvested the seed, to have the rose seed oil certified organic. Today the benefits of this ingre-

redient are backed by many independent scientific studies that have shown rose hip oil to be a powerful skin regenerator that also helps prevent premature skin aging. It also helps with scar and stretch mark tissue and wrinkles and discoloration or hyper-pigmented skin. In fact, Aubrey Organics has been donating Rosa Mosqueta oil to burn centers to help reduce scarring for many years.

Another miracle of nature that Hampton brought to market is blue green algae, which is used in several of the company's hair and skin products. Organically grown in Upper Klamath Lake in Oregon, this algae's high glycogen content promotes cell growth and is especially beneficial to the hair and scalp. Studies have also found that the algal extract can inhibit acne-causing bacterial growth. The algae also contains GLA-regulated prostaglandins that are anti-inflammatory and help promote dilation of blood vessels and prevent clotting, swelling, pain and skin redness.

Cosmetic Challenges

Although Mother Nature offers many natural solutions, there are still a few key functional ingredients missing from the organic personal care manufacturers' toolbox. For example, if you look at Aubrey Organics NuStyle quinoa protein hairspray, you will notice that the ingredients have separated. This is because it doesn't contain any emulsifiers, says Curt Valva, the company's president and general manager. While Valva hopes that as the market for organic personal care grows, the options for functional ingredients such as this will expand as well—until then, the consumer must play the part of the emulsifier.

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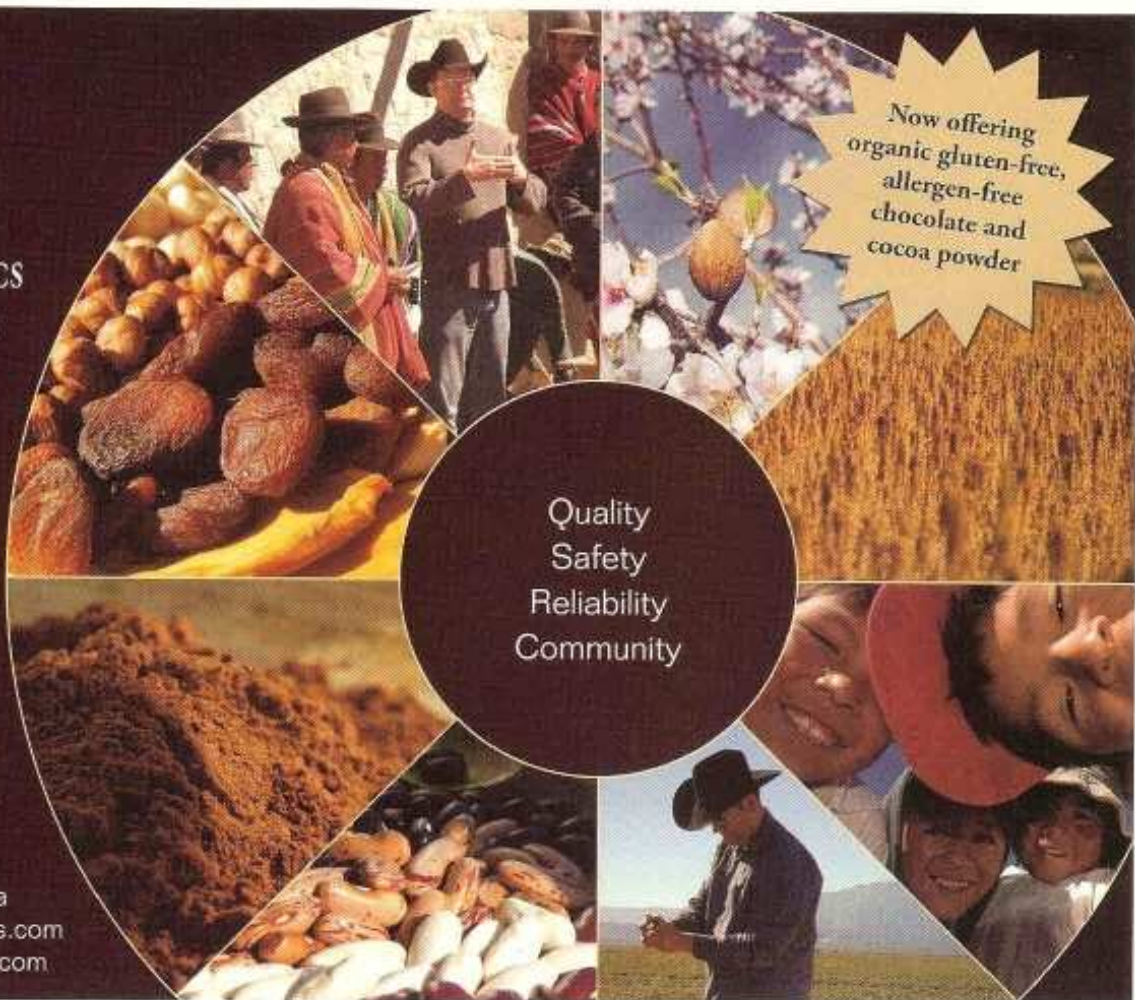
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“We think most organic consumers would not mind shaking a bottle in order to avoid synthetic emulsifiers. When we were kids, it was ok to have the chocolate in our chocolate milk settle to the bottom. It was just accepted that you had to stir it,” Valva says. “The problem is that today there are many consumers—and even retailers—who would look at the product and think there is something wrong with it.”

The way Aubrey Organics deals with this challenge is through education. A key part of this is training retail staff. This is also one of the reasons why the company chooses to sell only in natural stores and not in mass beauty chains.

In addition to organic-compliant emulsifiers, Valva would also add organic surfactants to his ingredient wish list. “The only one that has been available is castile soap, which is somewhat harsh.”

Organic manufacturers also don’t have much to choose from in the way of preservatives. However, Valva says that Aubrey Organics has overcome this hurdle by approaching the preservative system differently. “Conventional companies create a product and then throw in the preservative at the very end, whereas we create the product from the beginning to be self-preserving. This may mean adjusting the pH by adding something like citric acid to move it out of the middle range where bacteria thrive. Sometimes it is about better packaging. The point is, when you are formulating without conventional tools you have to approach it differently from the start.”

Until some of these tools are developed, though, Valva says that under current NOP food standards it will be almost impossible to make some USDA Organic certified products—such as shampoos or firm hold hairsprays—that can compete with other options on the shelves.

Certification Conundrum

Besides a limited toolbox, Valva says another challenge is the fact that personal care manufacturers have to choose from a multitude of organic and natural certifications, ranging from USDA Organic and NSF 305 “contains organic” to European certifications like Ecocert and NaTrue. Unlike food, which has one organic certification that is accepted in the United States, personal care manufacturers have to weigh the expense, marketing benefits and restrictions of all these labels. “Many companies don’t get certified at all because they don’t know which is best and it’s too costly to certify to them all,” Valva says. “They all have a wide range of requirements as well. Seeing that the NOP standards were made for food, not personal care, they are most certainly the most difficult to meet. But even the NSF 305 ‘contains organic’ standards, which many U.S. or-

ganic companies including Aubrey Organics helped develop, are more strict than many other ‘organic’ certifications around the world.”

Still, Aubrey Organics has decided to go with the NOP and NSF 305, the labels that Valva believes will still be left standing at the end. The products that cannot be certified organic are certified natural through the Natural Products Association. So far they have certified about 25 products to the NOP and have yet to certify anything to NSF 305. However, Valva points out that the NSF certification does allow more flexibility with processes and ingredients than the USDA Organic standard, which in the end may encourage more manufacturers to go organic.

“The hope is that the NSF standards will eventually get absorbed into the NOP regulation as a provision for personal care,” Valva adds.

Clearing Up Consumer Confusion

With all the different seals on the market right now, it can be a bit overwhelming for consumers to keep up with what they all mean. Even more confusing to consumers is seeing a product boldly displaying “organic” across the bottle, only to flip it over and find that it contains little or no organic ingredients. The problem stems from the lack of regulation. While food is required to meet the NOP guidelines in order to have the word “organic” anywhere on its label, for personal care, NOP certification is still voluntary and the use of the word “organic” is currently unregulated.

To bring some order to the claims chaos, last summer Whole Foods sent out a mandate requiring that all personal care products either certify to the NOP or NSF standards or take “organic” claims off their label. In its notice, Whole Foods states: “We believe that the ‘organic’ claim used on personal care products should have very

What Is the NSF 305 Standard?

When the NOP was written, it was focused on food and didn’t really address the needs of organic personal care manufacturers. As a solution, NSF 305 was launched in 2009 to establish materials, processes, production criteria and conditions specifically for personal care products that are formulated with organic ingredients. This standard allows “contains organic ingredients” claims for products with organic content of 70 percent or more that comply with all other requirements. The NSF 305 standard is a consensus-based standard, which means it was developed based on balanced participation from key stakeholder groups, including organic personal care manufacturers, trade associations, regulators, organic program administrators, organic product retailers and other representatives from the organic products community.



similar meaning to the 'organic' claim used on food products, which is currently regulated by the USDA's National Organic Program. Our shoppers do not expect the definition of 'organic' to change substantially between the food and the non-food aisles of our stores."

When Aubrey Organics was informed of this change, they immediately set the plan in action to remove "organic" from anything that didn't meet NOP or NSF 305 standards—no matter how much organic content the product may have. They expect to have all labels changed by next spring. While Whole Foods' policy change was a catalyst for Aubrey Organics to make this change sooner than later, Hampton says that it is something they had been planning to do for over two years. "Even though we used 'Aubrey Organics' as our brand name for decades be-

fore the NOP was even established and probably could have fought to have it grandfathered in under the NOP, we want to be as authentic as possible," he says. "Ever since we started, we have supported regulation and transparency of any claim we make. Every product is certified to a respected third party standard."

While Whole Foods may be cleaning up its organic personal care section, what about other stores that carry organic personal care? What is the long-term solution? "The ideal answer to all the confusion would be to have a globally harmonized standard, but with all the differences to sort out, that may be a while," says Valva, who has been on practically every standards setting board in the United States and EU. Until then, Valva recommends that companies certify to the most recognized seal in the country their products cater to, and in the U.S., he says that is either NOP or, secondarily, NSF 305.

Leading into the Future

While things get sorted out on the regulatory end of organic personal care, Hampton and Aubrey Organics will continue to push the movement forward through innovation, proving to the world that synthetics are simply not needed to make great personal care. Until each petrochemical laden product has a functional natural or organic alternative, Aubrey Organics' work is not done. □

Kat Schuett is the editorial director of *Organic Processing*. You can reach her at kat@organicprocessing.com.

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