

# Benefits and blemishes of a developing organic beauty sector

» The organic health, skin and cosmetic care sector is growing strong around the edges despite the reluctance of many larger players to take on certification. **Jaime Newborn** investigates.

**F**armers and face foundation have never had much in common before. Now, a growing interest in what goes on – not just in – our bodies has lead to heightened demand for certified organic beauty goods. According to Eliza McGivern, Marketing Manager of Sydney Essential Oil Co Pty Ltd (SEOC), that means more goods sourced farm-fresh instead of contrived chemically in cosmetic labs. That in turn means more shoppers with access to bottles of products that began life as a living organism, within an industry notorious for its chemical ingredient blends.

SEOC is an Australian certified organic cosmetic ingredient supplier, providing a wholesale service to a small base of cosmetic manufacturers committed to authentic natural products, as well as spa and massage enterprises choosing organic for clinic and treatment purposes.

Ms. McGivern says while many products claim to be “natural”, when defined in the strictest sense of the word, it is a claim unique only to certified organic products. This is this attribute which both promotes yet prevents the ethical expansion of the certified organic beauty category.

“Organic raw materials have very volatile prices – and big businesses want stability. When you’re working at the mass end of the cosmetic industry, extreme weather variation – cyclones, drought, torrential rain – don’t matter because you’re in a controlled laboratory environment. But obviously these incidents affect organic producers, and there is a direct follow-through on the price, quality and availability of beauty product ingredients. Essential oil is very much commodity styled, like a banana or apple price, it fluctuates”, says Ms. McGivern.

But she says the benefits of organic beauty goods from the perspective of the consumer are strong.

“Because plants are grown without the support of artificial inputs, they’re stronger, more robust and have developed a natural resistance to environmental pressures. Organic essential oils come from regions where the growing conditions are suited to growing that product and by-and-large the aromatic profile of organic compared to non-organic will be more vibrant and lively.

“When we first began to expand our



organic lines we issued both organic and non-organic oil to our customers to compare and the feedback we received for organic was very positive.”

Carrying a broad range of essential oils, carrier oils, cosmetic bases, extracts and hydrosols, Eliza says SEOC are uniquely positioned to spur on the growth of organic beauty in Australia by facilitating the uptake of certified organic by currently non-organic cosmetic processors.

“The level of inquiries we get asking for supportive advice on manufacturing is increasing by the day, although the relative proportion of organic to non-organic product output remains small”, she says.

“SEOC has invested heavily in research to find organic alternative blends to overcome key ingredient obstacles – emulsifiers being a major one. Unfortunately we can’t always offer specific advice – we’d be teaching chemistry to every client.”

But she says better options will become more accessible to those thinking about processing organic cosmetic products as ingredient break-throughs continue.

“We are currently working on certification for a number of market-

ready formulas – one step up from raw ingredients – suitable for a manufacturer to convert to a finished product without having to start from scratch”, she says.

She says with so few certified organic products available, it is likely intensifying consumer demand for ‘clean’ skin and body care products are being met by false natural claims.

“Large commercial cosmetic manufacturers often like the idea of organic but step back when they see the realities of the cost and commitment involved in sourcing genuinely natural and active ingredients.”

Health and beauty is currently one of the largest retail segments in Australia, worth \$8,821 million in 2004, and comprising of four retail sectors: pharmacies, specialist retailers, department stores, and supermarkets.

Ms. McGivern says certified organic product in Australia is likely to continue retailing in smaller, boutique outlets in the near future at a price that is competitive with a mid-to-premium range of beauty products.

Sustained consumer interest in health will drive natural product sales in the future according to the Australian Health

'Off-the-shelf' non-organic moisturiser	Certified Organic moisturiser (Miessence)
Water	Organic aloe vera leaf juice
Dimethicone (silica)	Purified water
Carbomer 941	Organic Rosehip seed oil
PEG-50 Almond Glycerides (almond)	Organic jojoba seed oil
Sodium Laureth Sulphate(coconut)	Organic safflower seed oil
Cocoamidopropyl Hydroxysultaine	Organic shea fruit butter
Triethanolamine (TEA)	Organic sugar-cane ethanol
Sodium hydroxymethylglycinate (suttocide)	Non-gmo lecithin
Phenoxyethanol	Organic bitter orange extract
Methyl Paraben (organic preservative)	D-panthenol (pro-vitamin B5)
FD&C Yellow No.6	Organic lavender essential oil
Fragrance	Organic grapefruit seed extract
	Organic olive juice extract
	Sclerotium rolfsii gum
	Organic olive juice extract
	Organic calendula extract
	Organic chamomile extract
	Organic marshmallow extract
	Organic olive extract
	Organic St. John's Wort extract

and Beauty Report. Other trends to impact the beauty industry include increased life expectancy, an ageing population, one-stop shopping, and discount pricing.

### Where can you feel the difference?

Consumer benefits of organic skincare are comparative, according to Narelle Chenery, founder and director of organic natural beauty success story ONEgroup.

Narelle first began her foray into organic ingredients when she realised most products making natural claims still contained synthetic toxins, and has since created the

thriving natural health brand Miessence which has sold internationally since 2003, beginning from her kitchen table.

Narelle says the overwhelming response to her brand demonstrates a market appetite for products that "feed the skin, naturally" and that most consumers are eager to gain a better understanding of the toxic properties of chemical ingredients.

"Unfortunately, many consumers are lulled into a false sense of security by the perceived 'naturalness' of skin care ingredients. But 99% of 'natural' ingredients are actually synthetically processed ingredients derived from a natural source. And the issue is that

many of the processing aids for these synthetic ingredients have been linked to human health issues like asthma, learning disabilities, infertility, birth defects and cancer. Certified organic products prohibit such ingredients, which is the consumer's saving grace."

Look no further than the label to understand the merits of organic cosmetic products.

Courtesy of ONEgroup, to the left is a comparison of ingredients in an average "off the shelf" moisturiser and a Miessence certified organic counterpart.

### What's wrong with column number one?

Narelle highlights the issues with the ingredients in an off-the-shelf product:

**Dimethicone** – the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) states it's harmful by skin absorption, an eye irritant, a skin irritant, it causes tumours in lungs and thorax, causes tumours in endocrine system, and the toxicological properties have NOT been thoroughly investigated.

**Sodium Laureth Sulfate** – the MSDS states it is made with 4 known carcinogens: formaldehyde, dioxane, ethylene oxide, acetaldehyde

**Triethanolamine (TEA)** – the MSDS states it is severely irritating to body tissues, corrosive to the eyes, and reacts with nitrosating agents to form nitrosamines, which are carcinogenic

**Phenoxyethanol** – the MSDS states it is toxic to kidney and bladder, causes reproductive disorders, serious damage to the eyes, causes brain degeneration.

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**Sodium hydroxymethylglycinate**  
- decomposes in water to release formaldehyde.

**Where are people extra concerned?**

Narelle says Miessence will launch a new baby range due to concerns from parents in particular over the semi-natural ingredients

found to be contaminated with the carcinogenic 1, 4-dioxane in commonly used non-organic baby products.

**Searching for certified organic**

The defining of dedicated standards for the cosmetics sector both at home and overseas in recent times is finally having the effect of clearing the blurred lines between legitimate natural / organic products and pseudo products in the marketplace.

A new standard launched this year in Europe occurring in parallel with the addition of a distinct cosmetic standard to the BFA's Australian Organic Standard (AOS), is

ensuring improved regulation of the industry at a time of unprecedented demand.

While the new standards still represent a challenge for many manufacturers there is a growing

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list of currently certified organic skin and body care products available. To search for Australian Certified Organic organic manufacturers simply visit [www.bfa.com.au/search.asp](http://www.bfa.com.au/search.asp) and type in the product keyword eg "skin", "body", "shampoo", etc.



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