

International organic beauty standards evolve

Why consumers who want natural from the skin-in should stay sharp

Organic cosmetic certification is moving into its next phase – despite the lack of equivalencies between organic cosmetics' standards globally.

Ms. Akiko Nicholls, Managing Director of Australian Certified Organic (ACO) says many cosmetic standards that were previously in development are firming up, providing a strong platform for the increasing popularity of natural cosmetics, a market which is reportedly growing by over US \$1 billion a year globally.

However she says organic beauty remains a case of 'buyers beware' for consumers who don't know which certification mark to look for.

"Consumers cannot be content with just any organic logo, because all logos have different criteria when it comes to cosmetics – more so than food," she says.

In Europe, leading certification organisations have just released the final draft of the long awaited COSMOS Standard (for European organic cosmetic items) after six years of consultation.

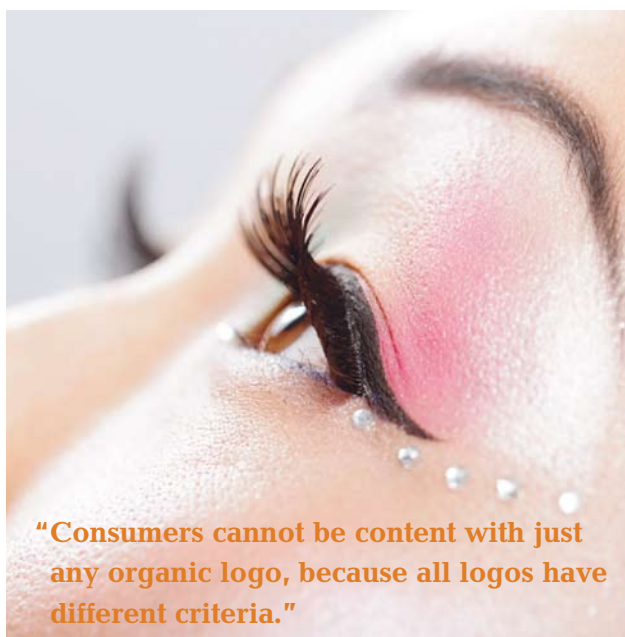
Despite the fact that Cosmos had the initial intent of providing a base standard for organic cosmetics internationally – and the fact it is backed by certifiers responsible for a combined total of around 1,000 cosmetic companies (10,000 certified products) – the long wait has resulted in the emergence of new strong standards contenders.

In Europe, the certification logo NaTrue is now identified as being the main rival for Cosmos.

In the US, standards by the Natural Products Association (NPA) are reportedly taking the lead, with standards by the National Science Foundation (NSF) also gaining traction.

In Australasia, the Australian Organic Standard (to which ACO products are certified) for cosmetics is fast becoming recognised for its stringent approach to product integrity.

Ms. Nicholls says the high percentage of



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organic ingredients required in ACO cosmetic products has seen ACO's cosmetic standards gain renown globally.

"The ACO standard for cosmetics is strict – it's one of the few cosmetic standards in the world which is very close to the standard for organic food, but which remains practical," she says.

"Under the Australian Organic Standard (AOS), 95% - 100% of a cosmetic product must be made up of organic ingredients. This is compared with some overseas standards that allow products to contain as little as 20% organic ingredients."

She observes there are some natural cosmetic products that will never be able to be called 'organic'.

"These are mineral based products. They contain natural ingredients and prohibit harmful chemicals and preservatives, but because the volume of mineral content is over 5% they cannot be certified 'organic'". (Minerals are not cultivated in soil and so cannot be classified as organically grown.)

But she says consumers looking for Australian mineral-based cosmetic products like foundations or blushes that were naturally derived could still look for

accreditation marks, like the BFA Approved Product (AP) logo.

Ms. Nicholls says both ACO certified and BFA Approved Products benefit in markets where consumers are savvy, such as Asia.

"ACO cosmetic products are becoming popular in markets like Japan, where consumers are very aware of the product ingredients' source," she says.

Denise Eaton, Senior Export Advisor, Health, Biotech & Wellbeing with Austrade agrees consumers in Asian markets have higher-than-average natural beauty expectations.

"Asian consumers understand organic certification and actively look for product branding which can guarantee organic credibility," she says.

"ACO in particular is developing brand recognition among Asian consumers, building on the ever-popular 'Brand Australia'" (the clean and green image Asian consumers associate with Australian products).

She says opportunities for Australian organic cosmetics in Asia will grow in the immediate future, as long as the industry can maintain credibility.

"That is where the importance of certification comes in, as the Asian market does not recover well from damaged trust.

She says it is also important cosmetic manufacturers remember the Asian market is not just one market.

"In each country, colours, packaging and labelling may need to be tailored. I would recommend all exporters to Asia visit their distributors around three or four times a year and really focus on building personal relationships on the ground."

Ms. Nicholls notes ACO's strong standards are helping penetrate the international market with government and trade agency support.

"Trade and government agencies are supportive of certified organic products because they understand certification is an important factor for the end consumer." ◆◆