

ORGANIC COSMETICS: THE THORNY ROAD TO EU-WIDE CERTIFICATION

By Annemarie Kruse

Organic beauty is growing strongly, not just in Europe but also in the US and Asia. And because green beauty is trendy, more and more conventional cosmetics manufacturers are jumping on the organic bandwagon. As a result, green-washing has become a major problem for the international cosmetics industry.

Green-washing means that a product is positioned as "green" or "eco" without being organic. There are different green-washing strategies: highlighting certain product claims ("with plant extracts") or using a tiny percentage of organic ingredients in the formula, so it appears to be entirely organic ("with 100% organic argan oil"). Often, manufacturers will just use the colour green on packaging and logo and/or design a "green label" which just happens to look like an official organic seal.

And this is where legitimate organic product certifications come in. An organic certificate means safe ingredients, no animal testing, no petrochemicals or synthetic ingredients. By the same token, organic certifications tend to boost product sales and can significantly increase the reputation of a beauty brand or manufacturer.

Internationally there are dozens of organic C&T certification agencies, all of which have different criteria for what constitutes a "natural" or "organic" product. Standards

vary from country to country and even within a country or geographic region, there might be different "natural" standards.

The European countries have the strictest sets of organic cosmetics standards in the world. Although there is no official EU organic cosmetics certification seal (the hexagonal EU Organic logo is used for food and agriculture only) every Western European country has, at least, one national certification agency and these days, there are two pan-European organic certification seals.

The main organic seals in Europe include Ecocert and Cosmebio from France, BDIH, Natrue and Demeter from Germany, the Soil Association from the UK and ICEA from Italy. All of these associations certify cosmetics brands and products from different European and international countries.

And although the certifications listed above vary slightly regarding individual ingredients - one association will certify a tenside which another association might consider to be synthetic - every single of these European standards forbids animal testing, synthetic ingredients (except for certain nature-identical preservatives), petrochemicals or derivatives or GMO-engineered ingredients.

While the existing organic product seals guarantee high standards of quality and product safety, the sheer multitude of seals and certifications is a major source of confusion for customers, even in countries with well-established organic

markets like Germany or France. The organic C&T industry is well aware of this and over the past decade, there have been attempts to harmonize individual national standards.

Natrue was the first pan-European organic cosmetics standard. In 2007, six manufacturers from the German organic beauty industry established the Natrue Association. Besides certifying organic beauty brands, Natrue

Since its launch, Natrue has become a popular organic certificate. The seal has a very high recognition factor in Europe and internationally. Frequently, organic cosmetics will carry two or more seals on the product packaging: in Germany, this might be BDIH and Natrue, in France Natrue and Ecocert or Cosmebio, in Italy ICEA and Natrue.

In 2010, preparations began for another international standard.

at least 95% certified organic ingredients) and Cosmos Natural (which requires a minimum of 20% certified organic ingredients). The Cosmos standard does not replace the various national seals; instead, the seal features the logo of the national certification body (such as BDIH, Ecocert or ICEA) and the Cosmos Organic or Cosmos Natural logo underneath it.

Products bearing the Cosmos logo have already started to appear on the market, but the seals of Natrue, BDIH, Cosmebio, Soil Association and so on are still much more prominent on product packaging. However, it is only a matter of time before Cosmos will become better known.

And yet another international standard is looming on the horizon: the ISO Guideline 16128 for Natural & Organic Cosmetics. ISO 16128 ("ISO 16128 Guidelines on Technical Definitions and Criteria for Natural and Organic Ingredients and Products") is an attempt to provide an accepted global standard of what constitutes natural and organic cosmetics. ISO stands for the International Standards Organization.

The current version of ISO 16128's criteria and definitions for Natural and Organic Cosmetics (NOC) is still very much under revision. Harmonizing so many different national interests is proving to be difficult and the ISO norm, as it stands at the moment, is already highly controversial. From a European perspective, many of the current criteria set down by ISO 16128 permit ingredients and manufacturing processes for "organic" products which are forbidden under any of the organic standards currently existing in the EU. The European certifying associations and most organic manufacturers are therefore highly critical of a possible adoption of this ISO norm into EU legislation.

ISO 16128 will also be a key topic at the upcoming Vivaness organic trade show: on 11th February, a lecture and panel discussion will focus on the potential effects of the ISO norm on German retail industry while on 12th February, representatives from Soil Association, Cosmebio and BDIH will discuss the likely impact of the ISO norm on consumers, manufacturers ■



In the absence of one standard certification seal for organic certified cosmetics, firms often display the seals of different certifiers. Natura Siberica stand at Vivaness 2015

acts as a lobby association, representing the interests of the European organic cosmetics manufacturers on an EU level. Currently, over 200 European brands are certified by Natrue.

Brands certified according to the Natrue standard must comply with the basic requirements of the EU's Regulation on cosmetic products (EC No. 1223/2009) and the criteria laid down in Regulation EC No 834/2007. Natural and organic certified substances used in the cosmetics must be certified according to the IFOAM Family of Standards or Natrue's standard, and fragrances must comply with ISO standard 9235.

There are three different certification categories: Natural Cosmetics (products formulated with the minimum levels of natural substances and maximum levels of derived natural raw ingredients as laid down in Natrue's criteria), Natural Cosmetics with an Organic Portion (at least 70% of the natural substances and derived natural substances must come from certified organic farming), and Organic Cosmetics (at least 95% of ingredients contained in the product must be certified organic).

Five national certifiers - BDIH, Cosmebio, Ecocert, ICEA and Soil Association - formed the non-profit organization AISBL, which is based in Brussels, Belgium. The AISBL has been engaged in drawing up a new international organic cosmetic standard which would allow consumers across Europe to immediately identify a product as organic or natural: the COSMOS standard.

To achieve Cosmos certification, a product or brand must comply with the organization's defined criteria in various categories, including the origin and processing of ingredients, the composition of the total product; storage, manufacturing and packaging, labeling and communication and inspection, certification and control. Also, the brands and manufacturers that use the COSMOS standard must comply with current EU legislation on cosmetics, including the EU Regulation on cosmetic products (EC No. 1223/2009), the EU REACH Regulation (EC No. 1907/2006) and the Commission Regulation on claims in cosmetic products (EU No. 655/2013).

There are two categories: Cosmos Organic (where a product need to contain at