



# The ethics of cosmetics

**New Trends in cosmetics show that ethical consumerism is maturing. Long-established in the food and financial services markets, it is fast migrating into other sectors of the economy and few cosmetics companies can now afford to ignore the opportunities presented.**

Consumers are increasingly demanding that the cosmetics industry produces more socially and environmentally responsible goods. Added to this, are demands within the industry for greater accountability and for transparency and monitoring of the production process. These principles have prompted the industry to rethink how they can support environmentally and socially responsible patterns of consumption. The increasing importance of these markets is validated by the development of a new set of standards by the Fair Trade Labelling Organisation to be launched at in-cosmetics 2006.

The profile of a typical ethical consumer suggests that this is good news for the cosmetics industry. With an ageing European population, and one in which young people are the heaviest users of cosmetics, ethical cosmetics provide a strong opportunity to tap into the market for older and more affluent consumers, who are key purchasers of green and ethical goods. At the same time, recent research in the UK (BRMB Access 2004) clearly demonstrates that the fastest-growing interest in ethically produced brands and products comes from young people.

There are several important implications from this. One is that ethical consumerism is here to stay. Another is that, as the market matures, consumers are becoming wiser. It is no longer enough to put a few well-chosen phrases on the packaging. Consumers want to know the true story behind a product's manufacture, and will see through any shallow attempts at "greenwashing".

Combined with this demand for ethical cosmetics, is increasing consumer demand for exotic cosmetic ingredients, largely prompted by the growth in tourism to Southern Africa, the Caribbean and South America, especially for European visitors. Better understanding of, and interest in ethnic cultures has also created interest in plant products that are traditionally used as cosmetics in developing countries. To a greater extent, new research has focused on plants that have historically been used as traditional cosmetic ingredients, combined with scientific investigation to prove their efficacy.

In line with these market trends, PhytoTrade Africa, the Southern African Natural Products Trade Association has developed sustainable and ethical supply chains for natural

cosmetic ingredients from Southern Africa. PhytoTrade Africa is dedicated to supplying the cosmetics industry with high quality natural products from Africa from Fair Trade and environmentally sustainable sources. The Association develops commercial opportunities on behalf of its members in the region based on collaboration with key companies in relevant markets for natural products in Europe, Asia and North America.

PhytoTrade Africa offers industry efficient supply chain configurations and raw material sourcing from over fifty strategically located producers across Southern Africa, presenting opportunities for supplies of both fair trade and organically certified ingredients. The Association houses an extensive library of documentary and bibliographic support and collaborates and contributes to the R&D and market development costs for products derived from indigenous Southern African plants. Most critically, PhytoTrade Africa provides legitimate access to African biological resources, traditional knowledge and folklore, and can support the industry to have practices consistent with national and international intellectual property and access and benefit sharing legislation.

An example of one such collaborative partnership is with Aldivia S.A. with which PhytoTrade Africa has developed Maruline, a new active botanical ingredient from natural Marula oil with enhanced antioxidant properties obtained through a patented process. It is the first botanical active ingredient that explicitly provides both social and economic benefits to the poor rural women in Northern Namibia who are the traditional custodians of Marula resources. Marula oil is produced from the seed kernels of the Marula tree (*sclerocarya birrea*). It has a long history of traditional use encompassing food and cosmetic uses. Innovative research by producers and institutions in Namibia has been combined with the "green chemistry" lipid science of Aldivia SA to bring Maruline to the international market.

Some plants from the African continent are already used as ingredients in mainstream cosmetics, such as ximenynic acid, derived from *Ximenia* oil. Many other plants and plant ingredients from Africa show interesting functionalities ranging from seed oil from the well-known Baobab tree, *Kigelia africana* (or the African sausage tree) extract, Mongongo oil, Kalahari melon oil and Mafura butter. The list of highly active ingredients for cosmetic and cosmeceutical preparations from Africa is developing rapidly. Commercial partnerships with Associations such as PhytoTrade Africa ensure that the industry is assured that new cosmetic ingredients from Africa can be both ethically sound and environmentally sustainable.

*Phyto Trade Africa, Stand Z145*