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# HERBCLIP

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FILE: *Kava (Piper methysticum)*

DATE: June 3, 1998

HC 041388

RE: **Wall Street Journal Profiles Kava**

Petersen, Andrea. The Making of an Herbal Superstar. *Wall Street Journal*, Thursday, February 26, 1998, pp. B1, B10.

This article examines the rise of kava (*Piper methysticum*) in the public eye from a marketing stand-point. Kava, the author says, "has found its niche as a "natural" alternative to such anxiety drugs as Xanax and Valium," in large part due to the tireless advocacy and promotion of Chris Kilham, a paid consultant to the herbal manufacturer Pure World, Inc.

The author strikes a fairly knowing tone, emphasizing kava's promotion over its documented pharmaceutical action and evidence that it is a safe, effective anxiety reliever. She notes that Mr. Kilham has written a book, *Kava: Medicine Hunting in Paradise*, presumably in the hopes that it (the book) will sell well. She acknowledges that although he bought \$5,000 in Pure World stock over a year ago, he says he has no other financial interest in the herb. In 1995, Mr. Kilham was sent to the south Pacific Republic of Vanuatu by Pure World to arrange a kava source; while there he was reportedly made an honorary chief. Based on this connection, Pure World is now one of the biggest kava suppliers in the U.S., "providing 60 companies with extract and processing more than a hundred tons of raw kava each year." Unfortunately, this article does not explore what this economic connection has meant to the Republic of Vanuatu. "I've made it my vow to popularize kava," says Mr. Kilham. "This is really like a ministry for me."

In early 1996, 21 herb companies formed the Kava General Committee of the American Herbal Products Association to "push the herb into the mainstream." The author charges that the Committee's purpose was to "avoid any regulatory scrutiny or consumer skepticism that could arise over kava's get-high reputation;" to that reputed end, the group commissioned a safety review of the herb, certainly an action of which consumer groups would approve. The review, says the author, is based on "a handful of small German studies on kava's effectiveness in treating anxiety." [The review was conducted by the Herb Research Foundation by Dr. Steven Dentali. It is available from ABC for \$59.95, catalog item #422.]

The article notes that Natrol “has become the most aggressive kava advertiser, spending \$2 million on print and broadcast ads last year.” Natrol plans to introduce two kava-for-kids products this year, although the Kava General Committee discourages the herbs’ use in children. The author appears to question the label claims made on kava products and the ways in which they restrict themselves to legislate “structure/function claims.” She politely derides industry efforts to present research and healthcare provider advocacy for kava as anything more than self-serving promotion, noting that author Dr. Harold Bloomfield is following up his 1997 best-seller *Hypericum and Depression* with a book on kava, and herb manufacturer Enzymatic Therapy, Inc. is sponsoring him at eight seminars relating to kava. “In 1998, you’re going to see kava just go through the roof,” predicts Dr. Bloomfield.  
—*Betsy Levy*

The American Botanical Council has chosen not to enclose the original article with this HerbClip memo due to the prohibitive reprint costs required by the original publisher.

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