



P.O. Box 144345 Austin, TX 78714-4345 ■ 512.926.4900 ■ Fax: 512.926.2345 ■ www.herbalgram.org

HerbClip™

Mariann Garner-Wizard
Jennifer Minigh, PhD
Densie Webb, PhD

Shari Henson
Heather S Oliff, PhD

Brenda Milot, ELS
Marissa Oppel, MS

AMERICAN
BOTANICAL
COUNCIL

Executive Editor – Mark Blumenthal

Managing Editor – Lori Glenn

Consulting Editors – Dennis Awang, PhD, Steven Foster, Roberta Lee, MD, Allison Turner, PhD

Production – George Solis

FILE: ■ Ingredient Substitution
■ Adulteration
■ Foreign Products

HC 070374-344

Date: January 15, 2008

RE: Ingredient Substitution in Imported Products

Pritchard J. Bogus ingredients harmful, hard to spot. Associated Press. June 14, 2007.

"American consumers are being ripped off and their health possibly put at risk because of bogus ingredients slipped into imports ranging from toothpaste to dietary supplements," Associated Press writer Justin Pritchard warns, referring to recent accounts of bad ingredients in pet food and toothpaste.

Ingredient substitution, he says, is not a priority of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), unless consumers are being exposed to harm.

Fad-driven supplements are particularly vulnerable, he says. Quoting Jana Hildreth of the Analytical Research Collective, a group of scientists advocating better dietary supplement testing: "People want low prices and they want quick turnaround time. And what's the one thing you cut? Well, quality control."

Pritchard says that after the Florida hurricanes in 2005 derailed the production of saw palmetto, Asian suppliers began selling "Chinese saw palmetto" for \$60 a pound. The extract being sold was based on palm oil, which is worth less than \$1 per pound and which no one claims has medicinal properties. "Despite the rip off, suppliers were not held accountable," he says.

When there's a shortage, "that's when you're going to see the adulteration," said James Neal-Kababick, director of Oregon-based Flora Research Laboratories. "It can be dangerous or it can just be a rip off."

In response, Steve Mister, president and chief executive officer of the Council for Responsible Nutrition, is quoted: "Responsible companies understand that they have a relationship of trust with their consumers." Other dietary supplement industry officials say

that some unscrupulous firms make bad products but those are the rare exception among the hundreds of U.S. supplement makers.

Lon Heiner, who oversees quality control at Utah-based Nature's Way Products, says that his company invests in finding reliable sources and then tests all the supplies.

Pritchard says that the FDA inspects only 1% of overall imports. At the time of publication of the article, federal regulators were close to producing "good manufacturing practice" guidelines for supplement makers that could solve some of the problems. These guidelines have since been published in the *Federal Register*. Without such guidelines, the private sector had already created voluntary quality certifications that could include overseas inspections of raw material suppliers.

Federal regulators find fake ingredients in domestic products as well, says Pritchard. For example, he says, the FDA has levied big fines and has won jail terms for makers of "pure" juices that were actually water, food coloring, and flavoring, as well as cheap soybean oil masquerading as olive oil.

"The FDA is assessing how it can outthink suppliers who try to substitute in harmful ingredients. It's a huge task: There are thousands of ingredients that could be altered in untold ways," writes Pritchard.

China also promises action. Beijing has announced steps to repair the battered image of its food and ingredient exports: a recall system, better inspections, and criminal punishments for those who ignore safety rules. Meanwhile, says Pritchard, the country has started rejecting U.S. shipments as substandard (products such as pistachios, raisins, and health supplements), "an apparent retaliation for criticism of its own exports."

—Shari Henson

The American Botanical Council has chosen not to reprint the original article.

The American Botanical Council provides this review as an educational service. By providing this service, ABC does not warrant that the data is accurate and correct, nor does distribution of the article constitute any endorsement of the information contained or of the views of the authors.

ABC does not authorize the copying or use of the original articles. Reproduction of the reviews is allowed on a limited basis for students, colleagues, employees and/or members. Other uses and distribution require prior approval from ABC.