

Organic Monitor

PRESS RELEASE

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Sustainable Cosmetics Summit Calls for Consumer Behavior Change

London – Greater steps need to be taken to change consumer behavior if the cosmetics industry is to reduce its environmental footprint. This was one of the key messages from the 4th North American edition of the Sustainable Cosmetics Summit (www.sustainablecosmeticssummit.com), which took place in New York City last month.

With the global population projected to reach 9 billion by 2050, questions are emerging about sustainability in the cosmetics industry. Critics argue that natural and synthetic raw materials going into cosmetic products could be re-directed to other worthwhile applications. Others question the role of beauty products in geographies where food poverty is rife and resources scarce. In the western world, life-cycle analysis shows that over 90% of the environmental impact of many personal care products is at the consumer level.

Against this backdrop, the summit organizer believes the way forward is greater efficiency in the production and use of cosmetic and personal care products, as well as encouraging sustainable purchases. A major challenge however is changing consumer behaviour. A paper by Accenture showed that 72% of consumers said they are ready to pay more for environmentally-friendly products, however just 17% actually purchase such products. Other research presented at the summit stated just 19% of American consumers are regular buyers of green products.

A number of solutions to translate green consumer intent to action were proposed by speakers. The Worldwatch Institute believes that sustainable business practices can influence consumers, whilst marketing and legislation can directly change consumption habits. Citing the example of the Washington D.C. plastic bags tax, Erik Assadourian said that government can be a major lever of change. Other speakers called brands to engage consumers for positive change, utilising social media as well as conventional communication tools.

The growing use of green ingredients in cosmetic formulations was also extensively discussed at the summit. Mibelle Biochemistry and IRB / Sederma gave details on how plant stem cell technology can be used to extract actives from plant materials. AkzoNobel showed how its zeta fraction technology can also be used as a sustainable alternative to traditional extraction methods. Mike Rohlfson from Heliae stated that marine algae could emerge as an important feedstock for cosmetic ingredients; unlike agricultural materials, algae are not susceptible to weather disruptions and poor harvests. The panel discussed the take-up rate of green ingredients and sustainable processing methods; although high

prices are currently a barrier, speakers stated costs were dropping as demand rises for such materials and technology.

Other papers highlighted the varying approaches companies have towards sustainability. With most companies focusing on raw materials / formulations and business processes for efficiency, the social aspects of sustainability are often neglected. Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps gave details of its fair trade projects for sourcing vegetable oils. Procter & Gamble demonstrated how large companies can make a social difference; 5.5 billion liters has been provided by its safe drinking water program, saving thousands of lives in Asia and Africa. Both companies stated a major challenge for such programs was scaling up such initiatives.

The North American edition of the summit raised further questions about sustainability in the cosmetics industry: how can companies take a holistic approach to sustainability and move away from isolated aspects? How do you measure sustainability performance? What sustainability schemes are emerging for natural raw materials? How can packaging be used in conjunction with formulations to reduce environmental impacts of finished products? What can be done to improve sustainability communications to consumers? How can mobile technology be used to influence consumers towards positive change? Such questions will be addressed in upcoming editions of the Sustainable Cosmetics Summit...

Sustainable Cosmetics Summit Latin America	São Paulo, 18-20th Sept 2013
Sustainable Cosmetics Summit Europe	Paris, 21-23 Oct 2013
Sustainable Cosmetics Summit Asia-Pacific	Hong Kong, 11-13th Nov 2013

About the Sustainable Cosmetics Summit

The aim of the Sustainable Cosmetics Summit is to encourage sustainability in the beauty industry by bringing together key stake-holders and debate major sustainability issues in a high-level forum. The North American edition (New York, 16-18th May 2013) was the 11th edition in this international series of summits; the proceedings are available for a professional fee. More information is available from <http://www.sustainablecosmeticssummit.com>

The summit in pictures

<http://www.sustainablecosmeticssummit.com/ny2013summitpics.htm>

About Organic Monitor

Organic Monitor is a London-based specialist research, consulting & training company that focuses on the global organic & related product industries. Since 2001, we have been providing a range of business services to operators in high-growth ethical & sustainable industries. Our services include market research publications, business & technical consulting, seminars & workshops, and sustainability summits. Visit us at www.organicmonitor.com

Further Information

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