

# Nature above all in cosmetics: There are so many challenges

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## ABSTRACT

The global cosmetics market is growing steadily. From the aspect of both consumers and manufacturers, focus is shifting towards identifying and solving the issues of eco-friendliness and sustainability without compromising performance. Natural cosmetics and certification institutions strive to achieve the best possible impacts, with the CosmEthically ACTIVE certificate representing a new, science-based, integral approach to the evaluation of natural cosmetics. Finally, we as individuals have the choice of changing our habits and educating ourselves. For the benefit of our future.

**Keywords:** certificate, cosmethically active, natural cosmetics, sustainability



## THE TIMELESS QUEST FOR BEAUTY...

... is driving the global cosmetics market to grow steadily, with estimated sales of more than €200 billion in 2019 (1). As a result of an ever-wider selection of cosmetic products, which are defined by the European Commission as *'any substance or mixture intended to be placed in contact with the external parts of the human body or with the teeth and the mucous membranes of the oral cavity with a view exclusively or mainly to cleaning them, perfuming them, changing their appearance, protecting them, keeping them in good condition or correcting body odours'* (2), today's consumers (rightfully) have higher expectations and more demands than ever.

## SUSTAINABILITY, REDUNDANCY AND TRANSPARENCY

Increasing concerns about the safety of products and their environmental and social impacts have brought attention to **sustainability in the cosmetic industry**. How can we meet the needs of our population without threatening future generations? An increasing number of educated consumers with easier access to scientific literature are becoming fonder of ingredients of natural origin, and are pushing companies to become 'greener' and consider sustainability through a cosmetic product's entire life cycle, i.e. from the selection and sourcing of raw materials, processing, manufacturing, packaging and distribution, to use and disposal, and post-consumer use (3–6).

**Simple formulations without redundant ingredients** are desired, where each is added with a known, evidence-based purpose (7). When choosing ingredients, those that are of natural origin or highly degradable and sustainable are preferred. They should also be responsibly sourced, ensuring that workers and communities involved in cultivation are treated fairly, both financially and ethically. Heavier focus must be placed on safety, both for the consumer, who expects safe, non-irritating products, and nature, which means the inclusion of ingredients that are organically cultivated, do not persist in the environment and are safe to all life forms. In terms of product safety, please be aware that generalising the concept that ingredients

of natural origin are better for the skin or hair simply because they come from nature has no scientific rationale.

Finally, **transparency** is expected for what is in a formulation and also where it came from.

## FORMULATING NATURAL COSMETICS...

... becomes even more challenging when taking into account that consumers also expect quality, excellent and attractive sensory properties, and the best cosmetic activity of a product. This is not easy to accomplish. The replacement of unsustainable ingredients (synthetic or natural) with sustainable ingredients with better skin and environment compatibility requires a great amount of knowledge, investigation and testing.

Even with all of these difficulties, the shelves are already full of products labelled 'natural' and 'organic', yet how can we be sure they are trustworthy in this era of misinformation?

There are no harmonised definitions or criteria for natural and organic products, and this lack of regulation in the industry provides a major opening for market manipulation. A system of **certification institutions for natural cosmetics** has evolved as a response and has become important, particularly from the perspective of consumers. Certification institutions have set their own parameters for the evaluation of cosmetics for the purpose of labelling them 'natural' and 'organic', where generally their criteria differ mainly through the percentages of minimum and maximum content of ingredients that are defined as natural and organic, and processed or derivatised. They also have different lists of chemical reactions that are permitted for the derivatisation of natural substances.

We must keep in mind, however, that natural does not necessarily mean sustainable, as it does not imply any ethical, social, economic or environmental responsibility. Generally, natural describes the origin of ingredients, while organic describes agricultural methods used for cultivation. The sustainability of cosmetic ingredients encompasses a wider concept. Not only



the natural source and destiny after release into the environment, but also the way an ingredient was extracted, purified or processed should follow rules of sustainability, including a high level of (bio)degradability into non-toxic and environmentally friendly compounds. We should also not forget that natural material is limited and should therefore be responsibly sourced.

## COSMETHICALLY ACTIVE

Through the **CosmEthically ACTIVE certificate**, our aim is to contribute significantly to the awareness and resolution of the aforementioned issues (8). CosmEthically ACTIVE follows a completely different approach of cosmetics evaluation because a shift has been made from assessing solely the naturalness of ingredients to assessing the activity and a cosmetic formulation itself, but without making significant compromises with regard to environmental aspects. We strongly believe that such a concept is based on a **rational understanding of modern cosmetology and the principles of sustainability**, and makes the CosmEthically ACTIVE certificate one of the strictest certification systems at the global level, strongly ori-

ented towards the healthy and ethical future of our planet.

To explain in greater detail, CosmEthically ACTIVE criteria are not based on percentages of substances. Ingredients are not explicitly categorised into natural and processed or derivatised ingredients, but into ingredients that are permitted and those that are not permitted. Consequently, the CosmEthically ACTIVE logo does not distinguish between different 'natural' or 'organic' categories. The focus is based on the intersection of cosmetic activity/performance, the naturalness and environmental impacts of ingredients, and dermal compatibility. We follow **five main rules**: nature above all when selecting ingredients; the use of ingredients in cosmetically active concentrations; rational formulations with no redundant ingredients; a high level of skin compatibility; and the pursuit of ethical principles with no animal testing. We are establishing the concept of active cosmetic products that contain the right ingredients in suitable concentrations to deliver the desired skin effects, but what is more, only physiologically and ecologically acceptable cosmetic ingredients that are highly biodegradable are allowed, to not only provide the best for the consumer, but also for the planet and future generations.

## YOUR CHOICE IS YOUR VOICE

In the end, how can we as consumers contribute to greater sustainability in the cosmetics industry? We should strive to **change our consumption habits**, with an emphasis on reducing the overall use of cosmetics, and choose brands that are sustainability oriented. Given that scientific literature is easily accessible, we should **educate ourselves**, properly review the ingredients of the products we use and then make decisions based on proven facts, not marketing trends. In addition, **sorting and recycling cosmetics packaging** or when possible choosing products with biodegradable or reusable packaging is an important step towards a sustainable future.

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