



A Growing Herbal Products Market Still Faces Formidable Threats, Challenges

Environmental and social stewardship can help sustain long-term interests and build trust among consumers. It's good for business too.

By Sean Moloughney
Editor

Demand for herbal dietary supplements has accelerated as consumers adopt natural, preventive product solutions for a spectrum of health concerns. This trend was brought into sharp focus in 2020 amid the global pandemic, as people sought stress relief and immune support, boosting sales of herbal dietary supplements to more than \$11 billion, representing a 17.3% increase from 2019, according to the American Botanical Council's (ABC) 2020 Herb

Market Report. Of course, 2020 also brought a spectrum of challenges, many of which persist today or have sparked other issues.

Looking back further though, over the last 25+ years, the U.S. herbal products market has grown considerably, with more ingredients and dietary supplement brands in the marketplace, noted Stefan Gafner, chief science officer at ABC. During that time, product formulations have evolved, growing in complexity to include combinations of botanicals and other dietary ingredients, while moving away from liquid preparations to capsules, gummies, and other new formats.

While the herbal/botanical dietary supplement market has become a dynamic industry, "herbal medicine," or the broader use of botanicals as medicines/drugs has been restricted by regulations that don't incentivize product development through burdensome documentation and costs, Gafner said.

"From a research standpoint, I see some positive signs by the fact that there are more and more clinical studies published, many of good quality," he said. "I certainly would like to see more of that, especially larger clinical studies, or studies in specific populations (e.g., children,

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pregnant women, older people), but our knowledge on the benefits and safety of botanicals increases faster and faster. It is also obvious that large companies have an appetite for successful dietary supplement brands based on the increasing number of M&As."

There have been numerous changes in the past quarter century with respect to the practice of herbal medicine, or phytotherapy, according to Mark Blumenthal, founder and executive director of ABC, including "more education and training of herbalists, naturopaths, integrative physicians, and other health professionals in the use of botanical medicines and dietary supplements."

There's also more clinical research to document the safety and health benefits of many traditionally used medicinal botanicals, he said, noting "a wider array of and more access to botanicals that

were heretofore generally unavailable to practitioners."

Annual increases in the retail sale of herbal dietary supplements in the U.S. have been "continuous and consistent," said Blumenthal, representing "tremendous growth" of the marketplace. "The availability of a wide spectrum of botanicals—many of them 'new dietary ingredients'—i.e., not sold in the U.S. market prior to the passage of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA)—as well as new forms of botanicals characterize some of this market growth," he added.

Another important factor in the development of the herbal products market in the past 25-30 years, Blumenthal noted, has been an increase in regulation (under requirements of DSHEA, the Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA), and other laws), especially in the area of Good Man-

ufacturing Practice (GMP) regulations and quality control.

"Advances in the availability of laboratory analytical methods offer responsible members of the herb industry wider opportunities to help ensure proper identity and authentication of botanical raw materials, extracts, and essential oils as well as the presence of potential unwanted adulterants and/or contaminants," he said.

Adulteration, Quality & Trust

However, amid market advancement, "there is the shadow side of this evolution," Blumenthal noted: "the apparent growth of adulteration and fraud in botanical materials—i.e., economically motivated adulteration, which includes, but is certainly not limited to the intentional manipulation of various botanical extracts in such ways as to try to fool or trick preva-

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lent analytical methods.”

According to Gafner, “the lack of quality” in some products represents the biggest threat facing the herbal/botanical supplements market. “This is why ABC partnered with the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia (AHP) and the National Center for Natural Products Research (NCNPR) at the University of Mississippi to initiate the Botanical Adulterants Prevention Program (BAPP), a program to educate the dietary supplement industry about botanical ingredient adulteration.”

The largest international non-profit consortium dedicated to researching and educating industry about fraud in the botanical marketplace, Blumenthal noted, BAPP has published more than 70 peer-reviewed documents detailing and confirming adulteration and fraud in the global botanical market since 2011. All BAPP publications are freely accessible at the BAPP homepage on the ABC website.

Cal Bewicke, CEO of Ethical Naturals Inc. (ENI) agreed that quality control is the biggest challenge the industry faces today, and has been for years. “Manufacturers are finding more ways to adulterate herbal extracts to reduce costs while meeting paper specifications, and many companies in the U.S. actively buy into this, either to save money, or because they don’t know better.”

For example, he said, BAPP found that a significant percentage of elderberry products on the market contained constituents not found in elderberry, “and these findings apply to most of the herbals they test, such as saw palmetto, Ginkgo biloba and others.”

This problem has increased across the botanical spectrum, Bewicke added, “due to supply chain shortages, and the trend to import and re-sell materials that aren’t tested in the U.S. At ENI we have always worked to avoid this problem by operating a complete U.S. testing program on all the extracts we supply, and storing and distributing all materials through our NSF cGMP certified facility.”

Gafner urged companies to understand the supply chain more fully. “Know where

their plants are growing, who processes the plants, and how they are processed. This can be done by thorough audits and also by building long-term relationships with reputable partners.”

Proper testing is another important point, he added. “Even if you have a trusted supplier, the authenticity of a botanical ingredient needs to be properly verified by fit-for-purpose analytical methods. Finally, companies should be well informed about the botanicals they are selling. This includes price ranges in which the specific ingredient is sold (since adulterated materials are often sold at lower prices) and what the potential adulterants are. Information on potential adulterants can be found, e.g., in the Botanical Adulterants Prevention Bulletins published by BAPP. And—of course—I invite companies that are not yet involved to become a supporter of BAPP.”

Blumenthal also suggested companies become “as expert as possible” on every ingredient they sell. “This includes compiling all appropriate literature related to the botany, chemistry, and genetics of each species—which could become a major research effort for companies selling dozens of plant materials. This information should be used in setting ingredient specifications that are needed before purchasing ingredients. Such literature should include, but not be limited to, the extensively peer-reviewed publications of BAPP, as well as official and non-official monographs (e.g., United States Pharmacopoeia, European Pharmacopoeia, American Herbal Pharmacopoeia [not official], and others). Other resources include the American Herbal Products Association’s Botanical Identity References Compendium.”

In addition to adulteration and quality questions, the industry faces critics who question the efficacy and overall benefits dietary supplements claim to offer.

“The recent news coming out of the US Preventive Services Task Force that ‘there is not enough evidence for or against taking most vitamin and mineral supplements, unless someone has a real deficiency’ goes against the mountains of

clinical and lab studies that clearly demonstrate the efficacy of certain ingredients,” said Collette Kakuk, vice president of global marketing at Layn Natural Ingredients. “Dietary supplements are just that: supplements to the diet. Most people do not get the proper nutrition from their diets, and certainly can benefit from vitamins, minerals and many other natural plants and compounds.”

This type of criticism should serve as a reminder to uphold transparency and honesty about ingredient sources and potencies, she added, referencing analyses of supplements on Amazon not meeting label claims. “Brands should not only require standard (Certificates of Analysis), but also do their own lot testing and audits,” Kakuk said. “Qualify, then repeatedly test and verify to be sure ingredients provided to you are not diluted or misrepresented.”

Work only with credible, reputable suppliers, she suggested. “Rogue players in the industry take short cuts, or simply do not test and verify ingredients. Now more than ever botanical suppliers must be diligent in testing, ensuring and documenting the identity, authenticity, source, safety, and efficacy of all raw materials.”

Transparency throughout the supply chain is essential for tracking and guaranteeing quality, and also ensuring consumer confidence that what they buy is what’s actually in the bottle, she said. “Further, it is increasingly important to emphasize and forge forward with solid science on the nutritional, practical, and functional evidence for botanical ingredients.”

Maintaining trust with consumers is and will always be an important challenge, said Steve Fink, vice president of marketing, PLT Health Solutions, Inc. “We are addressing that challenge with better and more clinical science, ingredient identity and traceability work, and responsible marketing.”

The company’s PLT360 initiative, introduced in 2015, is a business-wide commitment “to develop ingredients that our customers can be confident and proud to supply to their own customers,” said Fink, “knowing that these ingredients are safe,

“We have learned that by paying attention to sustainability questions we are in essence becoming a better, and more efficient company. Over time, the investment in these programs is paying off with greater efficiencies, better supply chains, quality certifications, and value-added products for our customers.”

—Jeff Wuagneux, RFI Ingredients

of high quality, efficacious, and harvested and manufactured sustainably. PLT360 examines every business decision and business process we undertake in an effort to become transparent with our operations, build trust with the health and wellbeing community and, together with them, support healthier, happier lives for the consumers we serve. The four main pillars, or activity areas, of PLT360 are ingredient integrity, quality, sustainability, and efficacy.”

Supply Chain Chaos

It's not news to anyone that supply chain and planning issues in the dietary supplement market continue to be among the most significant challenges today. According to Jeff Wuagneux, CEO of RFI Ingredients, the situation is likely to last “several more years.”

“The global pandemic seriously disrupted supply chains and distribution, not to mention transport and logistics,” he said. “Beyond the sharp inflationary trends, planning and committing to supply chains has never been more important. Obtaining the right amount of the right product at the right quality within a reasonable timeline is still the challenge for us.”

Recent lockdowns have affected global supply chains “deeply,” said Kakuk. “However, despite some lockdowns being lifted, expect continued global delays.” Lead times that were 3 weeks pre-pandemic are now 10+ weeks, she said. “Overall, lead time on the ocean from China to Los Angeles local warehousing is over 10

weeks (2-4 weeks booking, 3-4 weeks on water, 2-3 weeks for clearance and delivery) as U.S. ports are still reeling and slow to process. This used to be 3 weeks pre-pandemic.”

Kakuk advised companies to expect continued effects for raw materials and finished goods. “With Shanghai fully reopened Jun. 1, the port is in overdrive as manufacturers work to fulfill backlogs, with serious global trickle-down effects throughout the supply chain, including a rush to purchase raw materials, a flood of finished goods leaving factories, and heavy tolls on logistics that will last throughout 2022 and well into 2023.”

It's critical to work closely with suppliers to forecast raw material needs, she added, in particular with botanicals, “which are not a standard production cycle item, but rely on nature, growing seasons, and harvesting seasons.”

Gafner noted that companies have been adapting their inventory strategy to ease stress in the supply chain. “Companies used to have minimal ingredient inventories, but when the supply shortages started to impact dietary supplement manufacturers, those with low inventories to start with were the first to have products out of stock. I believe a few companies have started to re-think that strategy. It also appears that companies with strong supplier partnerships were less likely to find themselves in a supply shortage.”

Some companies have also started to move where their plants are grown more locally, Gafner said, “to be less depen-

dent on containers coming from overseas, especially Asia, due to the cost increase for shipping. But these companies are in a minority.”

Wilson Lau, president of Nuherbs, echoed that supply chains represent the biggest challenge to the herb/botanical industry today, and the situation has not abated.

Lau, who has been vocal and open with his thoughts and observations on the supply chain during the turbulent past couple of years, said “Nuherbs and I have become logistics and supply chain experts and we have put a plethora of systems and safety measures in place. We can't plan for all eventualities, but just build as much safety into operations as we can.”

He noted the transition from “just in time” to “just in case” inventory, adding that “it will be a great challenge to get it right, so companies don't get caught on the wrong side of things while ensuring that they don't leave too much on the table.”

Economic Uncertainty

One of the biggest problems today is “the increase in commodity prices,” said Gafner. As inflation first started to tick up, “companies tried to keep prices low and reduce the margin, but in recent months, there have been increases in prices of finished dietary supplements, and I don't think we have seen the end of this, yet.”

Things will get a lot more complicated in the supply chain because “even just the

fear that recession is coming makes forecasting so much harder," Lau said. "Will companies get the timing and severity right? It could be here as you read this, or it could be here next year some time, or even further out. Since I am not an economist I won't venture a guess of if or when. The other side is how rapidly people will change their spending habits and in what categories."

Compared to supply chains, inflation is a "tougher nut to crack," he added. Nuherbs specializes in premium botanicals from China specifically, and has been faced with "upward pricing pressures," said Lau. "Although we didn't label them as inflationary, they are."

The cost of doing business in China has been increasing for the last 3-5 years due to a range of factors, he added, "from the cost of labor to new environmental regulations."

Additionally, botanicals from China still have a 25% tariff on them levied by the Trump administration. "So a lot of the fat has been cut out of the sup-

ply chain, whether it's our margins being compressed to the brands using our herbs. Now we have worldwide inflationary pressures on top of this; it becomes a very hard thing to deal with, especially since everyone in the system has already taken hits."

Lessons Learned

Early in the pandemic Wuagneux said RFI singled out "two strategic areas for survival: employee health/safety and securing supply chains."

"We learned a great deal from managing both," he noted, "but with respect to supply chains, we learned we needed to plan a great deal more in advance and sell customers not on products or formulas, but on the need for advanced planning and commitments to supply chain. Because we offer a great many certified organic, GMP, Non-GMO Verified, gluten-free, and some fair trade as well as biodynamic/regenerative ingredients and formulas, managing supply chains is a critical piece to those

programs, and we were well prepared to take the long view. Getting our customers to move in that way took a little push, but we all got through this and would likely all say that as a result of these strategies we operate better organizations."

It remains a challenge to respond to the growing demand for and changing landscape of certifications, as each program has numerous standards and claims/benefits, Wuagneux said. "While certifications may add an official, 'better than,' halo effect to products, most consumers do not really understand them and the sheer number of them may have the opposite effect and confuse consumers. We continuously work with our customers to implement certification programs that make sense, add meaning and value to their products."

The inflation piece, he acknowledged, "is out of our control and there is very little we can do about it. What we can do is discuss the changes in the markets and supply chains with our customers, with as much transparency as possible, and again, attempt to give them both the short- and long-term views of the market. One of the great benefits of planning and committing in advance is that we are able to absorb some of the shock of inflation."

ENI began to increase inventory of ingredients for its key customers in early 2020, said Bewicke. "We work very closely with a few manufacturers and order ingredients many months in advance. These ordering patterns, as well as the supply relationships we've developed over the years, have also helped us to counter inflation."

Environmental & Social Impact

The success of the herbal dietary supplement industry, in some ways, could represent a long-term threat with supply shortages and a risk of overharvesting for some wildcrafted medicinal plants, said Gafner.

"Sustainability and better agricultural practices (i.e., regenerative agriculture) are really a necessity if this industry wants to have a future, but not all companies pay



attention to these important aspects,” he said. “The market is very competitive, and companies for which the biggest sales argument is the low product cost may buy wild harvested plants at a lower price even if it means that it’s not sustainably sourced.”

How companies should think about their environmental and social impact is a matter front-and-center in ABC’s Sustainable Herbs Program (SHP), Gafner noted.

“I believe that evaluating the environmental and social impact of producing herbal dietary supplements must be a top priority of each company if the industry wants to be around for generations to come. I would encourage companies to use the SHP webinar series, which dives into issues around responsible and ethical sourcing (e.g., climate change, biodiversity loss, social and economic equity, and regenerative farming), become a member of SHP to join pre-competitive discussions around collaborating on addressing these issues, and use the SHP Sustainability and Regenerative Practices toolkit (which is in the process of being updated).”

Collectively, the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and potential collapse of life-sustaining biosystems represent “the largest existential threat to humankind as part of the biosphere,” said Blumenthal.

“All companies selling ingredients and/or finished herbal products (dietary supplements, teas, cosmetics, et al.) should be aware of the growing body of environmentally-conscious consumers who are willing to pay more for herb products that contain what are presented as legitimately sustainably sourced ingredients and/or sold in sustainable and/or compostable packaging, etc.”

Executives and their teams should also rethink their concept of “supply chain,” which Blumenthal called “too linear.”

“It’s really more of a supply network. And it’s more than just about supply, it’s about value—the human inputs created at each step of the chain/network from foraging wild plants and/or their cultivation on small or large-scale farms, to their appropriate collection, separation of plant

parts, drying and other forms of processing, much of which is done manually in some geographical areas depending on the specific plant.”

As a company in the business of promoting health and wellness via plant-based ingredients, “PLT Health Solutions understands that environmental protection, sustainable sourcing, protection of natural resources, and ethical conduct are not only the right thing to do, they are also good business,” said Devin Stagg, COO of PLT Health Solutions. “Without a vibrant global ecosystem, we won’t have access to the natural, botanical materials that form the foundation of our products. And without a partnership-type relationship with the communities that grow, harvest, and process these raw materials, PLT Health Solutions loses access to the indigenous knowledge and innovation that makes our ingredients relevant and special.”

The company launched its People+Planet Initiative in 2021 with both environmental and humanitarian aims. “On the ‘people’ side, PLT supports groups dedicated to UN Zero Hunger and Good Health and Well-Being Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),” said Fink. “It also engages with literacy and math programs supporting the Quality of Education SDG to achieve our impact goals.”

On the “planet” side, PLT is focused on Climate Change, Life Under Water, and Life on Land SDGs, supporting organizations that promote wellness for the planet. “Goals for the initiative include providing 1 million meals to needy families, helping to bring new educational opportunities to more than 1 million children, and helping provide essential vitamins and minerals to more than 1 million women and children in low-resource settings by 2030,” Fink said.

Wuagneux said that it’s simply good business practice to consider sustainability planning at the center of everything else. “Partly because of supply chain disruptions and partly because of our commitment to certification schemes that require environment and social programs, sustainability planning has become a ma-

ajor part of what we do and affects every area of our company, from purchasing to regulatory to human resources to finance to sales.

“We have learned that by paying attention to sustainability questions we are in essence becoming a better, and more efficient company,” he continued. “Over time, the investment in these programs is paying off with greater efficiencies, better supply chains, quality certifications, and value-added products for our customers.”

The environment and social impact are foundational to Nuherbs as well, a minority-owned business with two of the three founders women. “Offering opportunities and mentoring women has always been a core value to our company, especially since my grandmother was one of the first wave of women to graduate college in the 1920s,” said Lau.

On the environmental front, as a premium herb company whose focus is quality, “we always realized that protecting the plants viability and their habitat is of utmost importance.”

The company is deploying solar power this summer, which will cover its facility’s entire energy needs, and is looking to gain additional environmental and social certifications for some of its organic-growing projects, such as ginseng. “The economy may make it hard for some brands to invest in projects that may not come to fruition for another year or two, but we will forge ahead to the best of our ability because it’s important to us.”

Nearly all of ENI’s botanical ingredients are derived from long-term, sustainable plant sources, said Bewicke. “Our extracts use ethanol derived from plant materials such as corn as a primary solvent, and a high percentage of this material can be purified and re-used. We’ve also pioneered the use of materials produced by fermentation, a method that has very low environmental impact. For example, we produce our AlphaWave L-theanine through this method. L-theanine is a constituent originally found in green tea, and is very difficult and expensive to extract from this source.”

Layn has nearly three decades of experience in providing a secure, transparent and scalable supply chain, said Kakuk. "Our closely managed farming partnerships and supply chain documentation ensure validation and full traceability—from seedling to field to finished product. Layn's vertically integrated structure allows for traceability throughout the supply chain."

True sustainability takes an intentional and concerted effort, she added. "While companies don't need to do everything all at once, demonstrating a sincere commitment to sustainability and honestly communicating these efforts are critical."

Sustainability must be approached holistically as an industry, she added. "Efforts and actions are being scrutinized in every area. Suppliers must evaluate seed sourcing and quality, farming partnerships and practices, and harvesting methods. Processing methods must also be looked at to ensure that they are safe and gentle on the planet, conserve water, reduce waste, utilize renewable energy sources wherever possible, and avoid unsafe practices and potentially dangerous chemicals."

Packaging is another big consideration and ecological problem. "In the areas of fulfillment and distribution, minimizing the environmental impact of packing, shipping, and transportation is also critical," she noted.

Efficient supply chains are not only sustainable, "but are also a competitive advantage," Kakuk said. Green washing, and companies that make unsubstantiated sustainability claims represent a challenge, especially for companies acting honestly and faithfully.

"Authenticity and true transparency are critical as consumers work to align with companies that place real value in caring for people, animals, and the planet," said Kakuk. "Misinformation and overblown messaging cause confusion, and water down comparisons and the real issues."

Companies and brands in the natural products industry are in a strong position to promote long-term social responsibility, she added. "We are inherently in the

business of doing things that are good for people, and along with that comes acting in ways that are also socially responsible to people. Many raw materials in the natural products industry come in the form of botanicals harvested from remote regions of the earth, and there are numerous opportunities to institute fair agreements with farming communities and networks, optimize agricultural practices and production methods that are safe, and minimize environmental impact. This industry carries a significant responsibility as stewards of the health of the planet and wellness of people in all respects."

Top Trends Today ...

Looking at consumer purchasing patterns, immune health products continue to be an enduring trend that is here to stay, said Wuagneux. "There are many herbal ingredients and blends that support the immune system. Natural and organic forms of vitamin C, like acerola are super-hot right now, especially in combination with other nutrients and antioxidant botanical extracts. Mushrooms with their rich tradition of use and trending interest also have great upside for immune health."

Meanwhile, the category of products to support sleep, stress, and mood is "exploding," according to Wuagneux. "Ashwagandha, a staple herb from Ayurvedic medicine, has become extraordinarily popular as has green tea extracts standardized to L-theanine. FermaPro fermented ashwagandha has great potential for use in these kinds of products as are time-tested liquid and dry extracts of passionflower, chamomile, lemon balm, and tart cherry."

Alongside sustainability and alternative delivery forms, Lau also noted stress support has staying power and compared the category today to what immunity was in 2020.

Wuagneux said understanding about the gut-brain axis represents another new frontier. "We are just scratching the surface of the relationship between the gut and brain and how they interact to affect

pretty much everything. Prebiotics, probiotics, and postbiotics are all terms that are exploding."

Fermented foods are ripe in the gut health market, he added. RFI offers its FermaPro line of custom fermented botanical, fruit, vegetable and spice products as a platform to build on the gut to brain trend, said Wuagneux. "Turmeric, ginger, beet, and flax are just a few of the many fermented ingredients that can be used in formulations to support the gut-to-brain connection."

Acknowledging impressive sales growth in 2020, Bewicke pumped the brakes on expectations a bit due to inflation and economic concerns, as people have less to spend on supplements. "However, I feel there will always be a strong demand for high-grade botanical supplements that truly support good health."

He also noted "substantial growth" for mushroom extracts. "This often doesn't show up on botanical supplement market reports where each mushroom is evaluated individually," Bewicke noted. "However, the high-grade, fruit body extracts are making very large gains through companies such as the Real Mushroom Company. This is a trend that I see continuing, as these products are developing such a wide appeal."

He also pointed to a "continuing and stable volume" of extracts that have formed the base of the herbal supplements industry for many years: Ginkgo biloba, cranberry, saw palmetto, and polyphenol-based extracts such as grape seed and skin. "These are products that many people use on a long-term, daily basis for genuine and proven health support."

Generally, consumers are paying close attention to labels and scrutinizing ingredient lists, Kakuk said, leading to opportunities for natural, clean-label botanical products. "Unique functional ingredients and botanical synergies are heavily trending among consumers," she added.

Kakuk also noted a lasting impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior. "The post-COVID consumer buys for prevention and increasingly specific function, or

stacked function (e.g., sleep and immune support).” They understand the value of natural, functional products, “particularly for concerns that have been emphasized by the pandemic, including immune health, stress, sleep, inflammation, and energy. They are searching out unique actives such as quercetin and investigating other terminology, such as polyphenols or flavonoids.”

... And For the Future

Looking down the road of possibilities, Gafner said that as a scientist, new technologies or applications of existing technologies that further our knowledge of plants is most exciting. “In the area of herbal medicine analysis, I am very interested in the possibilities to study multiple plant metabolites at once, which experts call ‘metabolomics.’ Since plants are complex mixtures of molecules that tend to interact among each other, new technologies allow us to better understand these interactions, and also how the multiple molecules may exert their effects in the human body. This is all really very exciting to me.”

Blumenthal anticipated the market will continue to grow and expand. “Millions of consumers will realize that plants hold countless benefits for humankind for food and medicine—and medicinal plant preparations will become even more important in self-care and conventional healthcare.”

Unequivocally, in today’s era of ‘self-care,’” Kakuk said consumers are searching for natural solutions with efficacious and lasting benefits, “and increasingly more personalized solutions delivered in preferred formats.”

As a promising sign of things to come, Fink noted rapid growth of supplement use by younger generations. “Rather than just address health concerns, people are recognizing they can impact their quality of life starting at a younger age. Issues of improved performance are becoming just as important as preventing decline in today’s market.”

The supplement industry has the opportunity to engage consumers as they

look to improve their quality of life, he added, and that offers companies opportunities to innovate. “Consumers are asking us for more and it’s up to us to be able to deliver it.”

High-quality science, including gold-standard clinical trials to support the efficacy of ingredients and finished products “is more important than ever,” Fink added. “Our support for meaningful, properly conducted clinical studies is broader and stronger today than it has ever been in the 70-year history of our company. We encourage an industry-wide movement toward strengthening the science behind the natural ingredients that are marketed and applaud the members of our industry who are making the substantial investments required to make this a reality.”

Wuagneux agreed that younger generations of consumers are picking up where baby boomers once led. “The quality of products is improving, and the science supporting the use of herbal supplements is growing. The herbal supplements business has grown annually by double digits for a long time and is mostly recession

proof. The major trend for consolidation will bring about big winners with major brands, and losers, like small brands and local stores, but the net effect will be a significant amount of growth. The science will continue to evolve and the industry will lead its own efforts to self-regulate and create tougher standards to weed out the bad players.”

Sustainability and social responsibility have become real market drivers over the last two years, said Fink. “At PLT we have always been concerned about these issues but today we find we are communicating about them more frequently and in greater depth.”

Lau sees a “vibrant future” for the herbal products marketplace. “I am most excited about the possibility that we can be leaders in the sustainability movement, especially for localized, smaller projects. We can develop more tools to fight climate change to ensure that our herbs can grow in their native habitats and that they can be enjoyed by my two kids throughout their lives, and hopefully future generations as well.” **NW**

