

WUTTKE GROUP

IS YOUR SKIN CARE SUSTAINABLE?

By Mark Wuttke, Principal, Wuttke Group www.wuttkegroup.com

In recent years, we've seen skin care companies embrace the concept of "sustainability" in their marketing material. Their attention to this idea has largely been driven by consumer demand and rising expectations. It's a great example of how consumers can play a very powerful role to affect positive change in an industry.

While there are certainly skin care companies that genuinely care about sustainability and the effect they have on the environment and people's health, many others are simply chasing the trend, and in their case the cart is clearly leading the horse.

This can be seen in their "outside-in" approach to sustainability. In other words, the most immediate changes we have seen have been external to the actual product: recyclable and biodegradable packaging, non-virgin shipping materials, charitable donations, forestry stewardship programs. And while any step toward a safer, greener future is a positive one, the real change needs to happen *in the bottle*, by fundamentally changing the way products are formulated and how the raw ingredients are grown. Bottom line, a product cannot merely be "green by association." True sustainability happens on the farm.

When we think "farm", many of us imagine an idyllic landscape akin to the farms of EB White's classic tale "Charlotte's Web." Rolling hills changing with the seasons under the care of capable, intuitive hands that not only work upon the land but *with* the land to produce the bounty of the earth.

Of course, the reality of modern agriculture more resembles a factory - mechanical, chemical, and cash-oriented. The benefits of industrial farming have been tremendous:

- Massive crop yields
- Genetically modified pest-resistant plants
- Highly effective pesticides
- Tremendous flexibility of growing regions
- Ability to grow the same crops continually without letting the earth "fallow"

The cons, unfortunately, are far greater, and essentially all come down to the use (or lack of use) of chemicals to enhance growth. After all, even products that are plant-based often require chemicals to produce. Some of the many negatives to conventional growing include:

- The petro-chemical-based fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs are in finite supply
- They damage ecosystems even as they boost them.

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- Industrial farming displaces the farming communities that are rooted in traditional farming and their expertise is lost.
- Waste runoff from agriculture is the single largest source of water pollutants.
- Overuse of irrigation causes water scarcity, an increasingly alarming global issue

When faced with a choice between long-term and short-term goals, most people and companies will make the expedient choice. However, as public awareness and interest in the social and health benefits of organic products has skyrocketed, we've shifted toward an economic environment that encourages the use of better methods of production, including:

- Sustain the economic viability of farming communities and enhance quality of life
- Enhance environmental quality through long-term nurturing of the land rather than short-term exploitation
- Maximize plant efficacy and crop yields through a better understanding of ideal growing regions and conditions
- Find natural ways to address fertilization and pest-control.
- Utilize scientific advances and studies to partner with the earth and its farming communities rather than pushing them beyond their sustainable capacity.

The great news is that we have already done ourselves a tremendous service as a culture by voting for organic and natural products with our dollars. But if we are to succeed at reversing the trend of unsustainable farming, we will only do so by continually demanding that companies raise their standards, and choosing their products when they do. We also need to apply these same standards to the entire life-cycle of the product, from production to packaging to delivery to consumer to recycling. Because when we choose to invest in truly sustainable products, we invest in a truly sustainable future.

Mark Wuttke heads the Wuttke Group, LLC, a world class business development team with a focus on sustainable luxury, spa, boutique retail, organic luxury and the emerging category of eco-chic. Mark is an editorial advisory board member of Organic Spa Magazine, and works closely with LOHAS, Green Spa Network, and Natural Beauty Summit in America & Europe.
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