

Organic Products Retailer

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Organic

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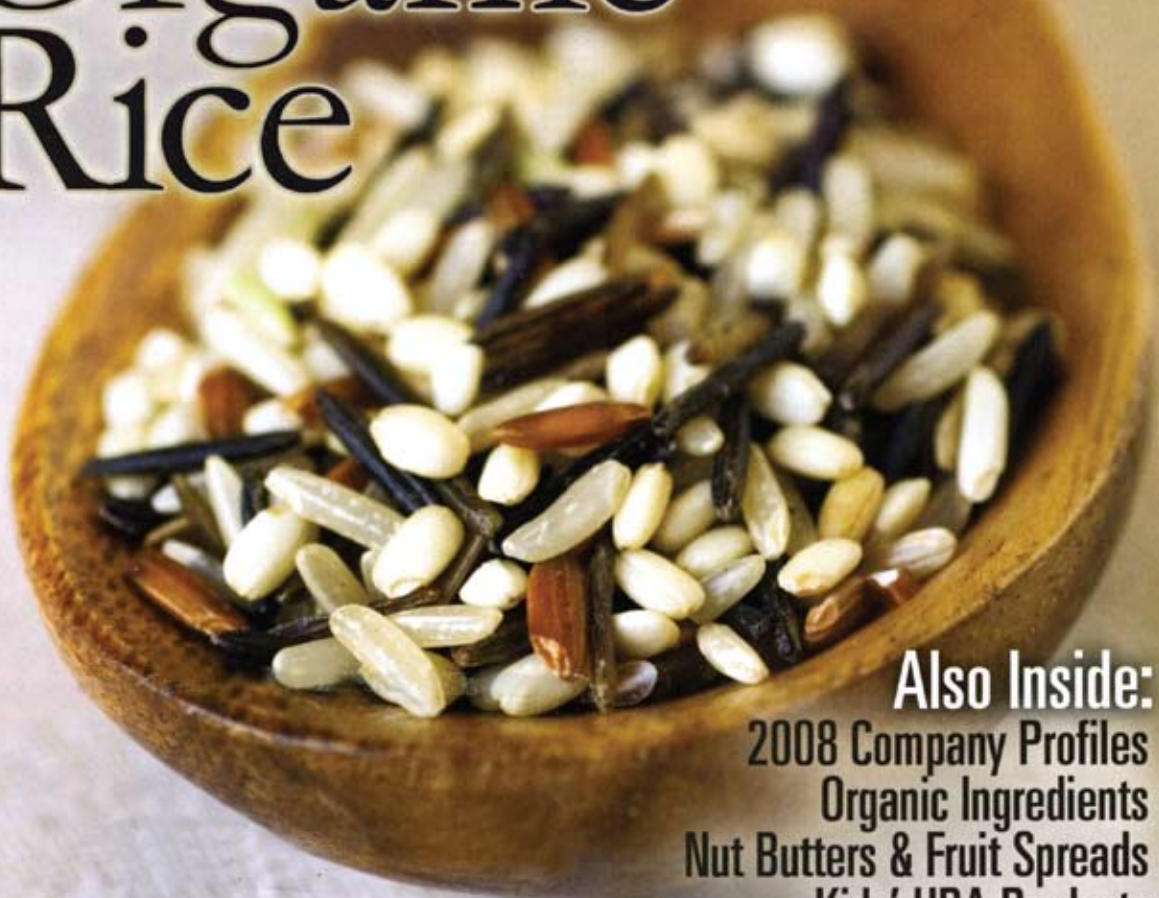
Organic

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Pure and Sustainable

Organic ingredient suppliers want consumers to know that not only are organic products healthier, but healthier for the ecosystems, communities and farms from which they are sourced. ■ By Melissa Kvidahl

Adam Stark said he was raised in the organic industry before it was an industry. According to Stark, it was a movement. His mother, who worked with renowned alternative healer Bernard Jensen, opened up Debra's Natural Gourmet (Concord, MA) 20 years ago and, to this day, the store prides itself on being a true source of natural and organic products and education.

"There are a lot of people and businesses out there that do organic right,"

Stark explained. "Unfortunately, as the attraction of what we're doing is broadening and more and more people come in and want a quick fix, I find that even people in the industry are not knowledgeable about ingredients. They'll spend more on marketing than on researching the organic integrity of the ingredients in their product."

And retailers like Stark, who are wary of manufacturers wanting only to cash in on the organic trend, are finding true organic ingredient suppliers of utmost value to their businesses. Especially

since customers are more knowledgeable about organic products, stocking products with USDA certified organic ingredients is more important than ever.

"Consumers have great awareness about organic material," explained Dolly Maheshvari, president of Orgenetics, Inc. (Anaheim, CA), "and that is the reason why growth of the organic market is approximately 15 percent per year."

Cost Consideration

Despite the perhaps tiresome argument



they're supporting—USDA certified organic ingredients are defined by their many levels of transparency when it comes to the processes taken to produce them," said Totman.

"My customers are pretty knowledgeable about the ingredients in our organic products," said Juan Hernandez, store manager of Erewhon Natural Foods (Los Angeles, CA). For Hernandez, who has been in the industry for almost 20 years, doing research for the customer is very important.

"They don't really have to worry about ingredients in our store because we have a high standard and stock organic products. Even so, they look at the labels to make sure it's right."

And with good reason.

"It used to be that you didn't have to read labels," explained Jentri Jollimore, marketing coordinator for WS Badger Company (Gilson, NH), a USDA certified organic personal care manufacturer. "With health concerns mounting in recent years and as long-term effects of

pesticides are explored, consumers are starting to awaken to the reality that organic agriculture is not only better and healthier for you, but for the planet as well."

But there is so much more to an organic ingredient supplier than just its product's benefit to the consumer. When a consumer buys a product with organic ingredients, they're often supporting not only the company, but a larger purpose.

"We strongly support the USDA organic standard, but we don't stop there," said Jollimore. "Our goal at Badger is to take our organic certification as a first step on a road toward cultivating a higher standard for ingredients from the farm and forest to the customer."

Sustainable Responsibility

As many interviewed will agree, a great number of organic customers choose organic because they want to feel that they're making a difference—even if it's just by picking a certain product over another. That's why more organic companies are stepping up to the plate and offering not just a product, but a cause as well.

CIRANDA supplies organic materials to several functional food manufacturers, which ultimately use the organic



WS Badger's Lavendar field

Keeping the Earth—and its Farmers—Well

Frontier Natural Products Co-op (Norway, IA) offers a full line of natural and organic culinary herbs, spices and baking flavors; bulk herbs and spices; and aromatherapy products under Frontier, Simply Organic® and Aura Cacia® brands. Frontier's goal is to provide consumers with the highest-quality organic and natural products while supporting and promoting social and environmental responsibility.

To this end, in late 2006, the company implemented its Well Earth global sourcing program, a proactive program designed to find and develop ethical and sustainable sources of high-quality products. Frontier is

using its Well Earth global sourcing program to improve the lives of impoverished communities around the world.

In June, Frontier donated \$30,000 in conjunction with Well Earth to fund an organic training program for 750 farmers in the state of Kerala in southwestern India. Frontier Vice President of Sustainability Kathy Larson and Kai Stark, Frontier's organic spice commodity manager, will travel to that region during the first week of December to observe the training classes and meet with the farmers to evaluate the programs' success. As part of the Well Earth certification process, Larson and Stark will also travel to Sri Lanka, where they'll meet with growers to inspect produc-

tion facilities and fields of organic cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, mace and white pepper.

"We implemented Well Earth certification for producers and growers with the goal of promoting the sustainable production of natural and organic products and creating long-term, open and honest partnerships built on sound social and environmental principles," Larson explained.

Today, Well Earth ingredients represent nine percent of total commodity purchases at Frontier and that percentage continues to grow. Six certified suppliers are in India, Australia, Guatemala, Germany and the state of Washington in the US. Organic ingredients produced by Well Earth certified growers

include black pepper, vanilla beans and extracts, fenugreek, cayenne, cardamom, parsley, sandalwood, peppermint, spearmint and turmeric.

"We work with suppliers to help them meet the strict guidelines of our Well Earth sourcing program, so we can convert as many farmers and growers around the world to ethical and sustainable agricultural practices," said Stark. "They receive greater premiums for their commodities, which they invest back into improving the quality of their products, their community infrastructures and their standard of living. It's a program consumers can feel good about contributing to when they purchase Well Earth products."

