

Naturex Responds to “Allegations of Biopiracy”

Editor’s Note: The following letter was written in response to the article, *Peruvian Maca and Allegations of Biopiracy*, written by Josef Brinckmann and published in *HerbalGram* (2007;75:44-53).

We at Naturex have been mystified by misinformation in recent media reports about our MacaPure® and MacaTonic™ extracts, which are made from maca grown in Peru through our patented extraction process. The most hurtful rumor is that we have somehow engaged in biopiracy—a serious charge that means removing a natural resource and prohibiting indigenous people from using that resource. Biopiracy is anathema to Naturex’s core values as a company. Consequently, this misinformation could not be further from the truth.

Contrary to some allegations, Naturex’s patents concerning the MacaPure and MacaTonic extracts are bona fide and legitimate, and our company’s work in Peru has been conducted honorably and ethically; Naturex’s MacaPure and MacaTonic extracts have provided Peruvians with the opportunity to reap substantial economic benefits. These are the facts:

1. *The patents protecting the MacaPure and MacaTonic extracts created something new.* Pure World (which Naturex acquired in 2005) obtained patents for isolating and extracting the maca plant’s key active compounds, which have attributes that enhance male virility. These patents were the product of Pure World’s significant investment in the process, and they protect Naturex’s innovations and investments, which ultimately have a health benefit.

Some people claim that the extracts possess the same properties found in the native plant, but we disagree. Pure World identified unique components in the maca plant that created something new, and those are the basis of the patents.

While we proudly acknowledge that Peruvians first discovered the benefits of the maca plant centuries ago, it took Pure World’s isolation and extraction of maca’s key components to make it broadly marketable as a valuable consumer product.



2. *Our substantial investment and research bolstered the market for a Peruvian export. We have promoted maca worldwide, and we have done so ethically and legally.*

Through our sales of the MacaPure and MacaTonic extracts, we have created a demand for our product that supports many Peruvian maca farmers and have introduced Peruvian culture and history to many who would not otherwise have encountered or appreciated it. Annually, Naturex purchases several hundred thousand dollars worth of maca from Peruvian farmers.

3. *At Naturex we believe in giving back to the communities where we do business and we’re doing that in Peru.*

To honor Peruvians for their discovery of maca centuries ago, Naturex will grant free licenses under Naturex’s patents to any 100% Peruvian-owned company in Peru to manufacture maca extract for sale to end users—something that will provide further support to the Peruvian economy.

Beyond granting these licenses, we are doing our best to put more money into the hands of maca-growing Peruvian families. Recently, Naturex voluntarily increased the purchasing price paid to maca growers in the Peruvian highlands. Pricing pressures from foreign buyers have put terrible limits on the earning potential of maca growers. By increasing our commitments to maca growers and the maca trade in general, Naturex will be able to produce superior quality maca products, protect the natural Andean environment, and enhance the future for some of the Andean people.

In addition, the Naturex Foundation, which opens this summer, will make social development grants to communities in which we do business, including Peru. Naturex is a corporate leader in its commitment to the environment and social responsibility and a member of the United Nations Global Compact, which means we believe in responsible corporate citizenship.

Antoine Dauby
Marketing Manager, Naturex
Avignon, France

Correction

A sidebar article in *HerbalGram* 75 (page 36) contains some errors. “Seeds under Siege,” written by Suzanne Edwards, incorrectly states that the Vavilov Scientific Research Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia, contains “a collection of more than 380,000 plants...” In this context, the word “plants” could be interpreted to mean “species,” which is certainly not the case. According to its Web page (www.vir.nw.ru), the Vavilov Institute “maintains a herbarium of 260,000 specimens.” Furthermore,



Seeds Under Siege

By Suzanne Edwards

It is a sad story that the Vavilov Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia, has lost a significant portion of its herbarium collection. The loss of these specimens is a major setback for the study of plant diversity and evolution. The Vavilov Institute is one of the world's largest herbaria, and its collection includes many rare and endangered species. The loss of these specimens is a major setback for the study of plant diversity and evolution. The Vavilov Institute is one of the world's largest herbaria, and its collection includes many rare and endangered species. The loss of these specimens is a major setback for the study of plant diversity and evolution.

the sidebar incorrectly states that within the purported 380,000 plant collection, “25,000 ... are now extinct in the wild.” Again, in this context, the number 25,000 could be interpreted as referring to species, which of course is incorrect. According to the 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/info/tables/table6b>), 88 plant species are globally extinct and 28 are extinct in the wild. The American Botanical Council regrets these errors and apologizes for any inconvenience they may have caused.