Herbal Nutraceuticals in Confections

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Nutraceutical foods have exploded onto the market, with estimated sales of $14 billion annually. Every food category is seeking to jump into this growing market.

Demographics in the U.S. will continue to fuel this market. Ninety percent of surveyed U.S. residents realize a relationship between diet and health. Ninety-five percent of surveyed consumers agree that certain foods go beyond basic nutrition and may reduce the risk of disease or other health concerns. Someone turns 50 every seven seconds in the U.S., and this baby boomer generation is confident enough to self-medicate and to self-treat. Alternative treatments, including the use of herbal supplements, have been aided by these factors. Additionally, many consumers are dissatisfied with the cost of conventional health care, which in the U.S. is the highest in the world while mortality and morbidity rates are not correspondingly low.

Beyond national borders, global acceptance of herbal medicines predates American acceptance. Prevention is as prevalent a reason for nutraceutical consumption as is treatment. The entire subject of pharma foods and nutraceuticals has appeared on everyone’s radar screen.

This paper will discuss botanical (herbal) ingredients, and skip vitamin, mineral and other nonherbal fortifications. We will point out practical issues in using these ingredients to enrich confections, without debating whether confections are a proper carrier for botanicals, or reaching any conclusions as to the efficacy of botanicals.

In order to have a common base, let’s use the following definition of nutraceutical: a food that has been enriched with a component that has expected health benefits. For the purposes of this paper, the terms “herbals” and “botanicals” will be used interchangeably.

Introducing an herb into a confection with the purpose of enriching the candy to provide a health benefit raises many issues, including the selection of the components, formulary issues, handling procedures, production suitability, production precautions, organoleptic properties and labeling.