

Non-profit World Stevia Organisation is broadening its scope to include all natural sweeteners, such as monk fruit, thaumatin, and others whose potential is still being explored, as sweeteners are frequently blended in food and beverages for optimal taste profile and performance.

The foundation of the organisation was announced in 2010, in the same week as the formation of the trade association the International Stevia Council (ISC). Unlike the ISC, however, membership of the WSO is not limited to suppliers only, but is open to all players in the supply chain and academia.

Moreover, the WSO is a non-profit organisation rather than a trade association, Angus Flood, EVP of strategy development at Wisdom Natural Brands, told FoodNavigator.com. Flood has been elected as president of the WSO for a three-year term by the scientific committee.

He said that the decision to include other natural sweeteners as well as stevia comes from agreement within the scientific committee "the future is a combination of natural sweeteners, and the accelerating move away from synthetic sweetener solutions".

The primary aims are to raise awareness of natural sweeteners at the consumer level so that multinational companies are not taking such a risk when they reformulate products; and to work with governments and NGOs to encourage support for farmers who want to grow sweetener-yielding plants sustainably.

The organisation says it has an inaugural membership of 500 companies, institutions and academics with a committed interest in next generation sweeteners.

New name coming

The name of the organisation will evolve in due course, to represent all low or no calorie natural sweeteners, such as luo han guo (also known as monk fruit), thaumatin, brazzein, and other potentially interesting new compounds from plants.

Emphasising that sweetening solutions tend to be blends, Flood said: "We think in terms of an orchestra, not musical instruments. We are going to make beautiful music in the world of natural sweeteners."

As for what exactly is meant by the term 'natural', Flood said there are different definitions in the US and EU, and for the global marketplace it tends to be fairly soft: "Molecules found in nature, presented in their natural state, with minimal processing".

Paris conference

Today the WSO is hosting its Taste-less Stevia and Alternative Sweeteners conference in Paris, together with its sister organisation the International Society of Antioxidant in Nutrition and Health (ISANHE).

The headline speaker is Dr Grant Dubois, research fellow with Coca Cola and author of 48 original research papers, 20 reviews and two books, and inventor on 85 patents and published applications.

According to Dr Dubois, in order to be commercially viable a natural non-caloric sweetener product candidate must score acceptably against the metrics of taste quality, safety, stability, solubility, cost and patentability.

He is giving a review of how the known low/no calorie natural sweeteners perform against these metrics, and what challenges they need to overcome to gain market share from synthetic sweeteners.

Source:By Jess Halliday, 25-May-2011, Food Navigator