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### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT STEVIA** **Popularity of natural sweetener is on the rise**

(Wallingford, CT), January 26, 2009 . . . With the FDA's recent approval of the Stevia leaf and its extracts as a sweetener, American consumers are discovering new options for improving the taste of their favorite foods and beverages. Many are embracing Stevia as a natural, no-calorie alternative to artificial sweeteners. Others are choosing it for its potential health benefits.

First used in South America, Stevia has been popular in Japan since the 1970s and is also widely available in Australia, Israel, New Zealand, Russia, Switzerland, Brazil, Argentina and many other countries. While the U.S. is late in adopting the use of Stevia for general food use, it has been approved for use in dietary supplements since 1995 and is a key ingredient in many products sold at health and nutrition stores.

Jonathan Selzer, Ph.D. and Technical Director at HerbaSway Laboratories, a Connecticut-based manufacturer of dietary supplements, has long been interested in the traditional health benefits of Stevia, which has been used to reduce stomach gas and acidity. "The health benefits were very important in our original line of traditional Chinese medicine products," he noted. "The sweetness was a secondary benefit that helped make our products more appealing to the American consumer," he added.

## *What you Should Know About Stevia*

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HerbaSway uses Stevia as the primary sweetener for its line of liquid herbal supplements, including its popular line of HerbaGreen® teas.

Studies have also shown that Stevia supports a healthy cardiovascular system and may have anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial effects. Its effects on pancreas function may be of particular interest to people with diabetes.

Potential health benefits aside, most consumers will turn to Stevia because it tastes good. “Originally, Stevia extract had a slight metallic aftertaste and some people were very sensitive to that,” noted Dr. Selzer. Recent developments in the extraction process have yielded a purer extract with improved taste. HerbaSway imports their supply of Stevia directly from a manufacturer in Asia, where the climate is particularly suited to cultivation of the herb. Stevia could become a viable crop in the United States, although it can be slow to germinate and does not always over-winter outdoors in freezing climates. It also requires regular watering in dry periods.

Major food manufacturers such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi have taken note of the benefits of Stevia, and it is now available in a variety of soft drinks and as a tabletop sweetener. Industry analysts anticipate a flood of new products touting Stevia as a natural and healthy alternative to other sweeteners. This could be confusing to consumers at first, since Stevia might not be the only sweetener in a particular product. Some beverages might also include erythritol, which is a sugar alcohol.

“If you’re concerned about getting only natural sweeteners in your food and beverages, as always, it will be important to read the product’s label,” cautions Dr. Selzer.

*What you Should Know About Stevia*

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*Jonathan Selzer has a Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg, Germany and has been researching the beneficial effects of Stevia since the early 90s. Dr. Selzer is the Technical Director at HerbaSway Laboratories LLC, a Connecticut-based manufacturer of dietary supplements. For more information, visit [www.herbasway.com](http://www.herbasway.com).*

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