

LEGAL HERBS

CENTER TO STUDY HERBS

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEH) and the Office of Dietary Supplements of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced a 5-year, \$6 million grant for a research center in Ames, Iowa. The center will initially study Echinacea (*Echinacea* sp.) and St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) through Iowa State University and the University of Iowa. As part of the National Institutes of Health, the NIEH is the principal federal agency for research on the effects of environmental agents on human health, including dietary supplement research. It investigates the effects on human health of environmental chemicals and biological agents and addresses how to better manage exposure risks. NIH Centers are currently at the Universities of California, Missouri, Alabama, and Arizona and Purdue University. One of their responsibilities is to advance scientific knowledge on the effectiveness, safety, and actions of medicinal herbs. NIEH Website: www.niehs.nih.gov ODS Website: <http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>

Natural Medicine Law, September 2002.

NIH GRANTS HERB RESEARCH

The NIH is funding a \$2.2 million grant for a three-year study on echinacea (*Echinacea* spp.) led by Dr. Ronald Turner, Professor of Infectious Diseases at the University of Virginia. He says that one problem with studying echinacea is that the amounts of active ingredients in products varies considerably so this study will use one crop that has been processed with different extraction methods to produce three concentrations that each contain different amounts of constituents. A total of 450 people will be given the herb either before or after they are infected with a cold virus to see if echinacea has any effect on the virus' ability to reproduce or on the body's inflammatory response. [Ed. Note: This follows the NIH's two-year, 2001 trial with 600 children to evaluate echinacea's effectiveness in shortening the duration and severity of upper respiratory infections and a 2002 research grant to GAIA Herbs and the SW College of Naturopathic to advance the herb's clinical application. See *AHA* 16:4, 17:4.]

HerbalGram, Fall 2002; & *NIE*, Jan./Feb. 2003.

GINSENG STANDARDS

The International Association of Dietary Supplement Associations is opposing international ginseng standards proposed by the Republic of Korea for the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables. They argue that sufficient international standards already exist in several national pharmacopoeias that are widely referenced.

National Nutritional Foods Association Newsletter (vol. 216, No. 9) October 2002.

GOLDEN SEAL AUTHENTICITY

An herbal analysis by an independent laboratory found that golden seal (*Hydrates canadensis*) is occasionally substituted for by goldentthread (*Coptis chinensis*). Their analysis is done with high performance thin-layer and liquid chromatography and infrared spectrometry to determine the herbs' authenticity and potency. Organoleptic examination by an experienced herbalist detects any variations in their color, odor, texture, and particularly taste. For example, goldenseal should be yellow with a bitter taste.

Natural Pharmacy, November/December 2002.

FDA EPHEDRINE WARNING

The Federal Drug Administration issued a notice March 1, 2003 that products containing ephedrine, which are derived from ephedra (*Ephedra sinica*), must bear a warning label that it can cause high blood pressure, heart attack, and possible death after 23-year-old Baltimore Oriole pitcher Steve Bechler died from heatstroke. Bechler suffered multiple organ failure when his temperature reached 108°F. The medical examiner cited several contributing factors, including an ephedrine supplement Xenadrine from Cytodyne Technologies that Bechler was taking to battle his weight problem. Cytodyne attorney Shane Freedman called it "premature, bordering on reckless, for the Broward County Medical Examiner to suggest that ephedra products were involved in Mr. Bechler's death" before the toxicology report was available. Orioles owner Peter Angelos called for the Major League Baseball to ban ephedrine or for Congress to make it a prescription drug while Orioles hitter David Segui said, "There's almost a witch hunt going on ... It hasn't been proven that ephedrine caused his death..." The warning label on ephedra already reads, "Consult a physician or licensed health professional before using this product if you are at risk of, have a family history of, or are being treated for ... assorted conditions, including hypertension and liver problems." Supplements containing ephedrine, typically combined with a caffeine booster, are banned in the Olympics and college sports and by the NFL following the 2001 training camp death of Minnesota Vikings tackle Korey Stringer from heatstroke [see *AHA* 17:4]. [Ed. note: The media is consistently confusing the herb ephedra with its constituent ephedrine, claiming that the problem is with the herb rather than a concentrated compound. See *AHA* 17:1,17:2.]

USA Today Feb. 20/21, 2003.

