

PureCircle looks to develop domestic US stevia supply

By Caroline Scott-Thomas, 14-May-2010

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Stevia supplier PureCircle has entered into a deal with S&W Seed Company to trial new varieties of stevia plants that could be grown in California in the near future, the company has said.

Currently, PureCircle sources its stevia from fields in China, Thailand, Paraguay, Kenya and Indonesia. However, the company's biggest market for stevia-derived sweeteners, particularly Reb A, is the United States. As manufacturers have started to introduce foods and beverages containing the sweetener over the past couple of years, the expectation is that US growth will continue.

PureCircle's corporate vice president of supply chain Dorn Wenninger said: "We're committed to sourcing stevia in areas as close to our customers as possible. Our agronomists are sharing best practices from our operations in Asia, Africa, and South America with S&W Seed Company as we work together to provide large scale volumes of Stevia leaf for American consumers."

Chairman of S&W Seed Company Grover Wickersham said: "We are delighted to be associated with the world leader in stevia leaf processing as we pursue our goal of introducing large scale production of stevia leaf in California. We believe our thirty year history of producing agricultural products in California, coupled with our stevia-experienced agronomists, will qualify us to meet PureCircle's needs for a domestic supply of stevia."

PureCircle has been accelerating its research into stevia varieties that could increase yields or provide greater concentration of sweet components so that less stevia is needed to gain the same level of sweetness.

Reb A currently sells for around \$300 a kilogram, according to market research organization Leatherhead International, high enough to pose a barrier for some manufacturers. PureCircle hopes that new varieties - developed through conventional plant breeding techniques - will help provide a more affordable supply for its customers.

Last month, the company entered into an agreement with horticultural researchers at Michigan State University to produce "a new generation" of stevia sweeteners. That partnership aims to produce new stevia plant varieties with higher concentrations of Reb A, while trying to gain a better understanding of all of stevia's sweet components.

US food and beverage manufacturers have been rushing to launch products that incorporate the natural, zero-calorie sweetener since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued its first letters saying the stevia-derived sweetener rebaudioside A, or Reb A, was generally recognized as safe (GRAS) in December 2008. Reb A is thought to be the sweetest component of the stevia leaf, among its other sweet elements, called steviol glycosides.

For more information on S&W Seed Company, please contact

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