

**BEST**  
OF THE INDUSTRY  
2011

NOW Foods' Andrea Champagne uses the company's new screening method.



# NOW Foods

NOW Foods' new adulteration-screening procedure puts product quality first.

**NOW Foods is truly an advocate** for the natural products industry. This year, the dietary supplement and nutrition brand announced it had developed a rapid adulteration-screening method for testing products. Not only that, the company is sharing this method with the entire industry.

By making its testing method public, NOW Foods may help other companies in the natural products space gain greater control over quality. NOW says it shared the method with FDA, the National Institutes of Health, as well as industry associations such as the American Botanical Council, the American Herbal Products Association, and the Natural Products Association.

Moreover, this method also has the power to change the public's perception about the safety of supplements, perhaps inspiring a greater trust in companies that adopt this screening technique and even in the natural products industry as a whole.

Details about the test were published in the January 2010 issue of *Vibrational Spectroscopy*. The screening method is described as Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy with attenuated total reflectance (ATR) sampling.

The *Vibrational Spectroscopy* paper states: "Thus far, most of the available testing procedures for raw materials have utilized expensive and time-consuming analysis techniques such as liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) or gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS). Both techniques require skilled chemical analysts to run the tests and interpret the results. Average run times can vary between 1 to 3 hours.<sup>8</sup> Such methods are not suitable as QC screening tools in a production environment given the high personnel and instrument costs, and long analysis delays."

Instead, the NOW Foods method utilizes existing equipment and software, is easy to use, requires minimal sample preparation and data interpretation, can be performed by non-technical personnel, and is functional across a wide range of raw materials and adulterants, the company stated in a press release.

Moreover, testing can be done quickly, requiring only 30 seconds for product to be grinded in an analytical mill before the scan is performed. Total time required, including for milling, to perform the entire screening process? Less than 10 minutes per sample, the company says.

"We wanted to publish the testing method to help keep all adulterated products off the shelves," says Michael Leleh, PhD, technical director. "If more manufacturers and ingredient suppliers adopt this or other testing methods, and consumers only supported supplement manufacturers that tested their ingredients, the market for adulterated ingredients could be eliminated."

Adulterated supplements are evermore a growing concern for FDA. The problem affects every supplement manufacturer by shedding a negative light of distrust upon the entire industry. NOW Foods began developing its screening method nearly three years ago, after hearing FDA say that spiking is a huge problem that the dietary supplement industry faces, from a public health perspective.

"We, as an industry, hadn't yet developed the tools necessary to ensure public safety. We needed a simple screening method to make sure our products were safe," Leleh says. NOW Foods has been using the testing method since January 2010 to test its sports supplements, a high-risk category for possible contamination, according to FDA.

"We tested the method and evaluated its performance on many different types of products before publishing," says Leleh. The test was designed to err on the side of caution, so it is likely to result in more false positives as opposed to not catching a contaminant, according to Leleh. He says that approximately five false positives were sent for analytical testing, which confirmed there had been no adulteration.

NOW Foods has also assisted the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) Standards Committee. The company participates in AHPA's committee to help set standards for microbial contamination and heavy metals, which have been published. Recognizing all of the company's efforts to help advance the industry, AHPA presented NOW Foods with its 2011 Herbal Industry Leader Award.

NOW Foods has more than 1500 skus that include dietary supplements, sports nutrition, personal care products, and health foods. It also manufactures private-label brands. The company's 263,000-sq-ft facility in Bloomington, IL, is often lauded for its up-to-the-minute manufacturing techniques. The family-run business was founded in 1968 and employs more than 600 individuals, while its steady growth has led to the creation of 201 new jobs in the past three years. Its international division sells nutritional products in over 70 countries, and continues to expand.

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