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BEAUTY & BRAINS

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THE THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO SKIN CARE
BY MELISSE GELULA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID LEWIS TAYLOR

Is it really organic?

AND DOES IT MATTER? A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

THE NUMBERS ARE CRYSTAL CLEAR: Products labeled *natural* and *organic* are the fastest-growing beauty segment, having clocked a 20 percent (US\$3 billion) increase in sales between 2005 and 2006. What's utterly unclear, at least in the U.S., is what constitutes a natural or organic product. "Right now, it's pure snake oil. You can say and do anything you want," says Gene Martignetti, the founder of Simply Organic, which turns out to be a case in point (but we'll come back to that).

He's right. In the U.S., just labeling a product *natural* makes it so: There are no regulations defining the word's usage. It's also perfectly legal to use the word *organic* in a brand name even if the product isn't. (Same goes for *pure*.) While the FDA prohibits beauty companies from claiming that a cosmetic treats or prevents disease or affects the skin's structure or function, it admits, in its *Cosmetic Labeling Manual*, that it "does not have the resources or authority under the law for pre-market approval of cosmetic product labeling."

What is certain is that very few products bear the USDA-certified-organic seal. Estée Lauder's Origins Organics, launching in October, will be the first mass brand to use it. The seal means the contents are at least 95 percent organically farmed; however, these products may still contain some chemical emulsifiers and preservatives. Seal scarcity is due to the difficulty of complying with the standards, which apply only to agricultural products, from lettuce to lamb. There are no USDA standards for cosmetics, says Joan ▶



Will the real organic product please stand up? Read on to find out which one is the real thing. Simply Organic Moisture Rich Hair and Scalp Wash, US\$34 for 8.5 fl. oz., www.simplyorganicbeauty.com for salons; Care by Stella McCartney Purifying Foaming Cleanser, US\$35 for 5 fl. oz., www.sephora.com; and Sumbody C Me Glow Face Cleanser, US\$19.95 for 4 fl. oz., www.sumbody.com

