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# PRESS RELEASE

August 2020

## Supplemental Healthcare

# Innovative vitamin production brings new market opportunities

**While COVID-19 was bad news for many industries, one of the positively impacted industries is the supplemental healthcare business. For instance, in Italy and France, consumption of OTC healthcare increased by more than 50% during COVID-19, compared to the same period one year ago. Especially vitamins C and D are currently hyped immune system boosters. Nevertheless, what is the origin of vitamins?**

The most common way of vitamin manufacturing today is synthetic, which accounts for the majority of vitamin supplements. The advantages are cost-effectiveness and ease of production. There are however alternative approaches, such as plant-based vitamins.

Plant-based vitamins contain a range of vitamins including phytonutrients, enzymes, and minerals. Since these ingredients allow better absorption and utilization of vitamins, it might pose a lower risk to the human body in the long-term than synthesized vitamins.

At the same time, plant-based vitamins are twice as expensive as synthetically produced vitamins. Further, the majority of vitamins with plant-based claim contain only a small share of plant-based vitamins, which weakens the claim of superiority over synthetic vitamins.

Plant-based vitamins are yet a niche product in the total vitamin markets, but the future looks bright, as increasing consumer awareness of health and preference to natural sources broadens the target group of consumers. Responding to that, vitamin manufacturers are actively working on identifying plants with provenances that allow the generation of interesting marketing stories and on developing efficient production technologies for the increasing number of plant-based vitamin sources. Subsequently, plant-based vitamins will further improve their market position against synthetic vitamins.

Another innovative approach is to increase the vitamin contents in crops, called biological fortification. Technologies for biological fortification include e.g. genetic engineering, plant

breeding, and the application of various agronomic approaches, such as adding specific ingredients in fertilizers.

Biological fortification could be especially interesting for regions where malnutrition is a serious problem. For example, the US company HarvestPlus developed crops that are bio-fortified and thus, have a higher nutritional value. One of the products is the vitamin A fortified sweet potato with orange flesh, which contains 50 times more vitamin A than common sweet potatoes. Improving the nutritional value of crops could contribute to a better nutrition of the population, without having to consume further supplements. Countries such as Zimbabwe and Rwanda have already introduced biofortified products in order to deal with the problem of malnutrition.

While biofortification could be an interesting source of vitamins, it is unlikely to replace vitamin supplements in the near future. For the rooting of this technology, right understanding and better acceptance will be prerequisites. Even though biofortified crops are not necessarily genetically modified, consumers often misunderstand them as GMO products, due to the fact that human efforts were added in developing the new art of crops. For example, smart breeding, which uses DNA information from plants for an optimal breeding, is often perceived as genetic modification. Due to the negative consumer perception of GMO products, this misunderstanding greatly hinders the acceptance of biofortified crops.

Further, there is a lack of acceptance by farmers. They are often critical about this approach, since they do not understand the necessity of adopting biofortified crops and lack knowledge about them. Education and support will therefore be necessary to bring biofortified crops to farmers.

Thus, in the future plant-based vitamins will attract more consumers, taking a more significant position in the vitamins market. However, they will not challenge the dominant position of synthetic vitamins, as their comparably straightforward and established production processes result in a high price competitiveness. Biofortification is likely to remain a niche.

**Interested in further information?**

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