



## Stevia (*Stevia Rebaudiana*)



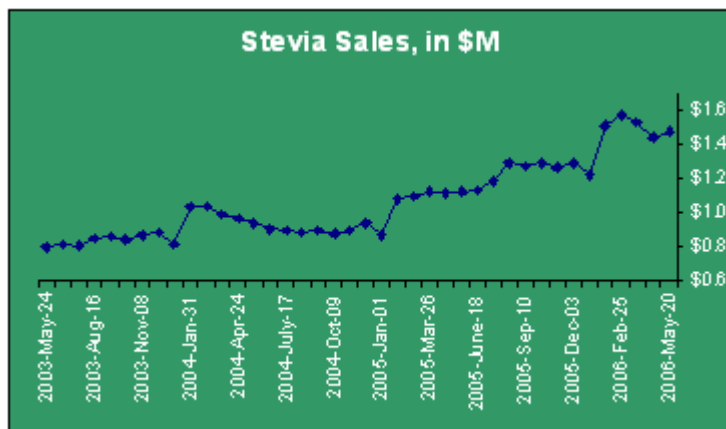
Stevia is a medicinal plant indigenous to South America, where it has been used for centuries to sweeten foods. Despite the challenging regulatory obstacles stevia products have faced over the past fifteen years, their sales continue to climb year after year in both the natural and conventional markets. Currently, sales of products with Stevia as a primary ingredient total \$13.7M in the Natural channel and \$3.3M in the Conventional channel (SPINScan, Current 52 weeks ending 05/20/06).

The sweet taste of stevia can be attributed to Stevioside, a compound that gives the herb a taste that is 200-300 times sweeter than refined sugar.

Because it is almost completely free of calories, stevia is an excellent sweetener for anyone watching their weight. Unlike sucrose and fructose, it does not cause spikes in blood sugar; in fact, the herb has traditionally been used to correct blood sugar imbalances, making it an ideal sweetener for anyone with blood sugar issues. Other medicinal uses for stevia include prevention of dental caries, energy support, weight loss and blood pressure regulation (Woods, 327,1999).

Stevia is a wonderful natural alternative to synthetic non-caloric sweeteners such as sucralose, Acesulfame-K and aspartame, which many natural consumers tend to avoid. Stevia was a popular sweetener in the United States until the FDA banned its import in 1991, classifying it unsafe as a food additive. In September 1995 the FDA lifted its four-year import ban on stevia and approved its use as a dietary supplement only. Today, stevia is sold in the supplements department of most natural foods stores. It is available in several forms, including packets, powder and liquid. With the popularity of functional foods on the rise, stevia is already finding its way back into a variety of products, including teas, carbonated beverages and meal replacements.

Legally, stevia can be included as a dietary supplement in food products but not as a sweetener. The consumer demand for products sweetened with safe non-caloric sweeteners is growing every day as more evidence mounts against the safety of non-natural sweeteners like sucralose, Acesulfame-K and aspartame. In spite of the federal regulations limiting the sale of stevia products, the herb continues to grow in popularity amongst natural and mainstream consumers alike.



4-week dollar sales, SPINScan Natural and Conventional channels

### References:

- 1.) Retrieved from the World Wide Web, June 23, 2006. <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/healthinfo/stevia.html>
- 2.) Wood, Rebecca, The New Whole Foods Encyclopedia, Penguin Books, New York, NY, 1999