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Açaí plantations may one day pad supply

By Clarisse Douaud

12/13/2006 - **If the Brazilian açai industry is going to satisfy growing demand for the wild-harvested superfruit, plantations may be the only answer, according to a distributor who says the country's government will also have to charge royalties for the germplasm to be grown in other countries.**

[Açai](#) berries are lauded for their powerful antioxidant properties and have a high level of anthocyanins. This tropical superfruit forms an integral part of the traditional diet for Indian tribes in the Amazon basin.

Demand for açai has soared in recent years, beginning with trendy North American juice bars in the 1990s, and then spreading to other functional beverages. However, the satiating domestic and international demand with an infinite resource means the crunch will have to fall on someone if a viable solution is not found.

In a follow-up interview to yesterday's article on açai, Jon Wisniewski spoke to NutraIngredients-USA.com on the issue of açai plantations as a means of providing back-up supply.

While the açai industry has the potential to uphold a sustainable economy in the Amazon region, it also has the potential to rob locals of a nutritious part of their diet, according to Wisniewski.

Wisniewski is general manager of pulp extractor [Nu Fruits of the Amazon](#). Established in 2004, the company purchases and exports açai pulp from the Amazon region near the capital city of Belem in Brazil.

Although Wisniewski estimated that the point at which domestic and international demand for Amazonian açai will far outpace supply is relatively far into the future, Nu Fruits has begun researching into the area of cultivating açai.

"Nu Fruits is working with a number of people in this field including horticultural and forestry systems experts, plant breeders, and açai growers," said Wisniewski.

Wisniewski speculated that the answer could be açai plantations and that a few are beginning to appear in Brazil. There are some small new açai plantations underway in the Belem region of Brazil.

But low yield remains an obstacle to this method catching on.

"In my view the productivity for the plantations that I have seen appears to be lower than the natural populations," said Wisniewski. *"But this is not unexpected, with such an early stage of development there is a lot of work to be done in terms of matching genetics and environment."*

The answer could be horticultural technology to improve crop yields.

"With an intact natural distribution of genes in the wild population, there is ample opportunity to select for improvements with nutrition and functionality as well as for such commercial requirements as fruit size, pip size, fruiting yield, etc," said Wisniewski.

As for açai plantations ever cropping up abroad, Wisniewski said this is a royalty issue among other factors.

"We consider that the Brazilian authorities should give this serious consideration but at the same time work to protect the name açai," said Wisniewski. *"This way royalties can flow back to Brazil for licensing of this germplasm, and we consider this to be a far more viable alternative than trying to stop the flow of unwanted germplasm transfers."*

While the Amazonian açai industry has the potential to save parts of the rainforest by ensuring it does not get cut down, Wisniewski said he fears that if demand increases beyond a certain level it will have a negative effect on the locals who rely on the fruit for their own consumption too.

In the capital city of Belem alone, an estimated 400,000 litres of açai are consumed per day by the city's 1.2 million inhabitants. Because it is wild harvested, Wisniewski said açai is not an infinite resource.

"Most exporters don't care and just figure locals can pay more," Wisniewski said previously. *"But the fact is that locals can't necessarily afford it."*