

Labido-enhancing root central in global dispute

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World Trade Organization. Attempts by Peruvian indigenous groups, meanwhile, ultimately failed to overturn U.S. patents based on ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic plant used for centuries in religious and healing ceremonies, and nuna, a nutritious Andean bean that pops when toasted.

Peru hopes the MacaPure dispute will become a pivotal case in attempts to require all patent applications to disclose the source of genetic materials.

Alejandro Argumedo, a Quechua Indian agronomist and activist, says the French company that bought PureWorld in 2005, Naturex, has no right to "privatize knowledge that belongs to an entire region."

Naturex's marketing manager, Antoine Dauby, says the company acknowledges that maca's beneficial properties were long ago discovered by indigenous Peruvians. He says its patent lets them "grow, sell and use maca as

they have for centuries."

"Our patent is for the extraction and isolation of maca's key ingredient—and nothing else," said Dauby. As a good faith gesture, he said, Naturex is offering to grant free licenses to Peruvian companies to use MacaPure in their products.

Qun Yi Zheng, PureWorld's former president and chief scientist, says the company invested more than \$1 million and three years of research in the endeavor and that it popularized maca as a worldwide Peruvian export.

Peruvians "should not be so narrow-minded," Zheng said, but should instead be grateful. "After we studied it, put money into the research, (maca) has become a useful commodity."

A wide range of potency peddling maca-based products—from powders and pills to jams and candies—have helped triple Peru's exports of the plant from \$1.3 million in 2000 to more than \$3 million annually since 2003, according to the Exporters

Association of Peru.

Japan was Peru's biggest maca customer in 2005, followed by the United States, Germany, Belgium and Canada.

Zheng's peer-reviewed study, published in the journal *Urology* in April 2000, showed that MacaPure greatly improved penile dysfunction in castrated rats. Also, lab mice fed the stuff for 22 days engaged in sexual intercourse up to 67 times in a three-hour period, compared with 16 times by less randy rodents deprived of the extract.

Peru contends PureWorld's alcohol-based extraction process simply mimics the centuries-old practice by Andean people of soaking dried maca root in Andean moonshine to release the libido boosters.

But providing scientific proof to show PureWorld's formula falls short of a "novel" and "useful" invention has proven elusive.

"We don't have the technology for this analysis and we

have had to turn to a scientist in the United States who offered to do the analysis for free," said Manuel Ruiz, a director at the nonprofit Peruvian Society for Environmental Law and a member of Peru's National Anti-Biopiracy Commission.

Peru has also enlisted the pro bono help of Washington attorney Jorge Goldstein to prepare a legal challenge. He is examining, among other things, archives from rural Peruvian universities to demonstrate that the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office failed to consider "prior art"—pre-existing knowledge that could be used to overturn the patent.

Chris Kilham, who conducted the initial field research for MacaPure in the Peruvian highlands, says he can see the issue from both sides.

"PureWorld, which did all of this work, found compounds that nobody knew existed before," said Kilham, a professor of ethnobotany at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

"On the other hand, the native people from whom the knowledge of especially the sexual applications of maca arise were not at all considered in these patents."

The specter of biopiracy in Peru dates back to the 1630s, when Jesuit priests took bark from the Peruvian cinchona tree—the original source of

quinine—back to Europe, where it was hailed as a miracle cure for malaria.

Peru never got wealthy from the discovery.

Cinchona seeds were smuggled by the Dutch from Peru in the 19th century and planted in Java. Indonesia became the world's primary source of quinine.

Program helping college-bound students

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—For Ashley Williams, going to college seemed too expensive.

"I'm a smart student, but a lot of times that doesn't get it," said Williams, a 16-year-old who lives in Durham.

But thanks to a North Carolina program that bundles together a high school diploma with a community college degree in five years, Williams won't have to worry about the cost.

"It really put my mind at ease," Williams said.

So far, 23 states including Tennessee have created these early college programs, which let students get a diploma and a two-year associate's degree in five years.

Tennessee has two such programs in Memphis, but Gov. Phil Bredesen has said he wants to create more in his second term to improve the state's graduation rate, which is about 79 percent.

"If students see the benefit, we can really see them walking away with a high school diploma," said Drew Kim, Bredesen's policy chief. "We want families to begin to think about high school in a different way."

Many of the existing programs are located at community colleges and give high school students an opportunity to graduate with a professional skill in five years.

The programs are still a new idea, so there's not much data on how successful the early colleges have been at getting kids to graduate.

"Anecdotally it sounds good, but we just don't have the hard data," said Jennifer Dounay, policy analyst for Education Commission of the States, a Colorado-based group that helps state leaders on education policy.

A supporter of early college programs, Joel Vargas, senior project manager for the nonprofit Jobs for the Future, said statistics from the first three early colleges show that 95 percent of entering ninth-graders got a diploma, 57 percent earned associate's

degrees and about 80 percent were accepted into four-year colleges.

North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley, who started the program in his state, agreed they have been successful, and he cited one student who went from an early college program to North Carolina State and was No. 1 in his junior class.

In any case, early college programs are certainly becoming more popular.

"They're something you've heard a lot about in the last couple of years," said Christopher Swanson, director of the Bethesda, Md.-based nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education. "It bridges the gap between high school and colleges. It gives students a leg up."

Michelle Brantley-Patterson, principal at Middle College at Southwest Tennessee Community College, one of the early colleges in Memphis, said the program is often a better use of the students' senior year.

"A lot of kids only have two or three classes their senior year," she said. "But by blending that senior year with requirements, it gets your foot in the door and you don't

have to wait a whole year before starting the next phase."

Easley said he got interested in starting the program in North Carolina after looking at his son's senior-year schedule.

"He had a lot of electives, courses that weren't that important," Easley said. "He was home by lunchtime."

Another benefit, officials say, is reducing the cost of college.

"A lot of time people are overwhelmed at the thought of dealing with college expenses," Easley said. "This lets them get the worry out of the way before they have any expenses."

For early colleges to be successful, experts say community colleges and local school districts must have a healthy relationship, as well as adequate planning and development.

"There needs to be a lot of cooperation between K-12 and community colleges," said Cece Cunningham, director of Middle College National Consortium, a school development organization that developed the curriculum at the Memphis schools.

Chancellor James Ammons of North Carolina Central University, home to the Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School, agrees there has to be "a close and trusting relationship between the university and the school system."

"One of the things we did over the year was to build that," Ammons said.

Ashley Williams, who will graduate from Josephine Dobbs Clement in 2008, will earn college credit toward a majors in public administration and political science.

"I plan to become a city manager, then governor, and who knows, maybe even president," she said.

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What's New For You?

As we begin the New Year, this is a time of promise and possibilities for us. It is a time when we feel that we can have a new start. As we review the past year, it may be that we did not accomplish all that we set out to achieve last year. The New Year brings with it the sense that we can have another chance to achieve the dreams that got away from us last year.

When it comes to the dreams that we have, we tend to focus on three areas of our lives in which we would like to see improvement. We would like to have greater health, wealth and love.

When you ask others about their New Year's resolutions, you will notice that generally they will all fit into at least one of these categories. Perhaps the most popular one is centered around health. How many people have said that during the New Year they want to lose weight or perhaps will exercise more?

Often people see this as a time to pursue new financial or career opportunities. This is a time that seems just right to set in motion plans that will improve one's financial situation.

This is also a time when people feel that they can perhaps create new beginnings with those they love and care about. It could be that in the past year relationships seemed strained or threatened. The New Year offers an opportunity to make some changes that could perhaps strengthen the relationships that mean so much to us.

As you think about the possibilities of the New Year, what will be new for you? Will you achieve better health, greater wealth, or stronger relationships? Do you have the resources in place to achieve your dreams and goals that you have for 2007?

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