

Medicinal and Aromatic Plants in Developing Countries

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Located in the interface of chemistry, medicine, pharmaceuticals, ethnopharmacology and industry (cosmetics, perfumes etc.), medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) are considered as one of the most challenging research fields. The developments in analytical chemistry, medicinal chemistry and molecular genetics have resulted in new insights, and in same instance, confirmed principles that had been proposed decades ago. As a consequence, a plethora of MAP products (fresh and dried plants, drugs, extracts and essential oils, among others) are currently marketed. However, in a growing number of phytoproducts, the quality and quantity are often questioned especially, in the developing countries.

Taking into account the great diversity in MAP and the different ecological and socio-economic circumstances, we believe that the marketed products fail in term of quality in the most of cases and we should be also aware of their detrimental effects. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the good quality of phytoproduct is tightly related with good practices and complete information such as the identification of species/varieties or cultivars, harvesting, postharvest process, transport, processing, packaging and storage. In developing countries,

none of these practices are respected especially in the absence of qualified persons (botanists, plant collectors etc.), government policies, social organizations and the ignorance of consumers.

Given that these phytoproducts are almost exclusively obtained from wild populations, their over-exploitation and their uncontrollable uses will led over the long-term to declining MAP populations, in particular those with high volumes in demand from national and international markets. Faced to this situation what we can do to meet the requirement of these phytoproducts without loss of the floristic potential?

In the absence of strict governmental legislations, control systems and public conscience, we think that it is impossible to conserve this precious heritage of MAP. Under such conditions, the most efficient mitigation strategies will be "doing nothing". However, this alternative will be driven by good and simple communication between authorities, scientists and public. At this point, the question is how to bring information between them especially, when we are faced to financial and material limitations?

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