



Visitors Get Inside Look Into How Herbal Supplements Are Made

By Claudia Infante, Projects Coordinator, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership

The people who toured the Herbs Etc. manufacturing plant during New Mexico Manufacturing Day activities last October saw how the Santa Fe company converts plant parts into liquid extracts that customers can buy online or at 2,800 U.S. retail outlets to treat a variety of ailments.

Anyone who missed out on that tour will get another chance this fall, when the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership lines up a new round of tours to highlight the state's manufacturing sector.

“We like to do these types of tours, because it allows people to see our operations,” said Glenna Warwick, director of production at Herbs Etc. Before the tour, “they have no concept of how a dietary supplement is made.”



They also learn how Herbs Etc. does things differently than other supplement makers.

Owner Daniel Gagnon, for instance, pioneered techniques for testing product purity and protecting herbs from damaging heat in the grinding chamber. All innovations aim to perfect the capture and distillation of natural therapeutic ingredients into formulas that are as fresh, potent and digestible as possible.

Manufacturing Day “tourists” start by donning special suits that prevent them from introducing contaminants to the factory.

In the receiving area, they see fresh, whole plants, herbs, roots, seeds and barks being unloaded from refrigerated trucks the morning after they're harvested by the company's suppliers — all organic farmers. Whole dried herbs also are delivered here.

Quality control workers then verify the authenticity and quality of these raw materials and measure the water content of fresh plants, as this affects the ratio of alcohol and water used in the next step.

In a process called kinetic maceration, fresh herbs are pulverized and mixed with an alcohol-water solution, agitated for 12 to 24 hours and allowed to steep in this bath for at least two weeks. Dried herbs go through a different extraction process using a cold-extraction percolator

— a glass funnel in which freshly ground dried herbs are infused with an alcohol-water mixture that yields a potent concentrate.

A press squeezes residual juices from the percolated and macerated plants, and the end product is subjected to microbial analysis before being encapsulated in soft-gel packets made in-house. Pulp and other leftover plant byproducts are given to local farmers to use as mulch.

Visitors also can see the research lab where new formulas are developed and tested.

In-person tours show the public how much care goes into the manufacture of health products at Herbs Etc., which bolsters their confidence in the company's products, Warwick said.

The state's commemoration of Manufacturing Day is part of a national effort to highlight the importance of manufacturing to the U.S. economy and generate interest in engineering, design and production careers. Manufacturers employ more than 30,000 New Mexicans in some of the private sector's best-paying and most stable jobs and contribute nearly \$6 billion to the gross state product.

Manufacturing Day events are sponsored by New Mexico MEP, which provides manufacturers training and expertise in efficient production and administrative practices. For more information about Manufacturing Day events planned around New Mexico, visit www.newmexicomep.org.

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