CORE CONCEPTS

The Lowdown On Beauty Product Certification

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For brands, the process of becoming certified by third-party organizations can be tedious. There's a big group of possible certifications to explore, and a web of domestic and international suppliers to get in order to meet their requirements. Plus, certifications can require considerable investment, both in terms of time and money. But that's not to say the payoff of certifications can't be considerable. In a beauty market that's increasingly suspicious of product claims, external validation can signal to consumers and retailers that a brand has legitimately committed to sustainability, fair working conditions and more. To help demystify the certification landscape, Beauty Independent checked in with 12 certifying bodies to shed light on their procedures. Below, find a guide to what the certifications mean, what it takes to achieve them, the investment involved and correct contact information for interested brands.

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CLIMATE NEUTRAL
CERTIFIED
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CLIMATE NEUTRAL

Brands certified by Climate Neutral participate in a collaborative effort to halt climate change, according to brand engagement manager Caitlin Drown. She says,"All brands must measure their previous year's entire carbon footprint—all of the emissions associated with making and shipping their products or services—[and] offset those emissions by purchasing high-quality carbon credits and implement plans to reduce their future emissions." Companies have to have been in business for at least one year before applying for certification.

The certification process takes three months and must be completed annually to stay current. Climate Neutral charges a minimum fee of $750 to cover the work required to certify a company. The fee increases for larger companies. Bands applying for certification must also invest in the aforementioned verified carbon credits, which vary in cost depending on the amount of emissions associated with product production and shipping.

Brand experience: Stephanie Pascarella, founder of Wash with Water, says, "Our experience becoming a certified Climate Neutral brand has been incredibly rewarding. Moving the needle beyond sustainability and achieving environmental protection is my mission as mother and founder of Wash with Water, and this significant commitment brings us one step closer. The breakdown of certification for small, medium and large brands allows each company a platform that is attainable. The starting point is just under $1,000 for annual certification. Environmental certifications of this caliber become less about fees and more about investing the time to build out annual plans that will continue to incorporate Climate Neutral standards. Another huge perk was the robust support provided by the Climate Neutral family, from webinars to individual touch points. This is a very hands-on effort to ensure mutual success."

Greg Starkman, co-founder and CEO of Innersense Organic Beauty, says, "After an in-depth review of the available organizations, we decided to work with Climate Neutral for our carbon-neutral certification. The process to measure our carbon footprint required meticulous data analysis as we aggregated all of our scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. Climate Neutral provided great resources, including their brand emissions estimator (BEE) as well as checkpoint calls along the way to help keep us on track and answer any questions. After three months of data collection and review, we were able to successfully quantify our total carbon footprint and identify ways to lower our impact in the future. We are excited to stand with other Climate Neutral-certified brands to collectively address the threat of climate change and invest in clean, renewable energy."

Contact: Drown asks that brands begin the certification process by filling out an online form. "The certification process varies slightly based on the size of the brand, so it's important that we get that information out of the gate," says Drown.

CERTIFIED cradle to cradle PRODUCTS PROGRAM

CRADLE TO CRADLE

To get a Cradle to Cradle certification, a third-party assessor examines the environmental and social performance of merchandise across five categories: material health, material reuse, renewable energy and carbon management, water and soil stewardship, and social fairness. To encourage continual improvement, products achieve one of four achievement levels—bronze, silver, gold or platinum—and are reassessed every two years.

There are three major costs associated with certification. The first is an annual contribution to the Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, which is based on a brand's annual turnover and ranges from $1,800 to $15,000. Brands with less than $10 million in annual revenues are charged $1,800. The second is a recertification fee every two years, which is essentially a licensing fee to use the certification mark. Recertification fees can include $3,600 for a certification application, $2,000 for biannual recertification and $100 for a revised certificate.

Lastly, there's a project-specific cost for the assessment of a product to Cradle to Cradle's standard, which is conducted by third party. The project-specific fee is determined by number of products that need to be certified along with the level of certification that a brand is seeking, from bronze to platinum. The fees are detailed in Cradle to Cradle's fee schedule, which can be found on its website.

For most beauty brands, the process takes about six months. However, Christina Raab, VP of strategy and development at Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, says, "The length of the certification process depends on the ambition for the certification level from bronze to platinum, and on the complexity of the product and underlying supply chains as well as on the sustainability starting point or baseline of the company."

Brand experience: Benjamin Bernet, founder and co-CEO of Bravo Sierra, "I first worked with Cradle to Cradle when I was global marketing director at Kiehl's. I was in charge of sustainability for the brand, and I read Bill McDonough's book ['Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things'] and loved his philosophy. We then launched a hand wash that was certified, and I really appreciated their approach to partnering with brands.

When I started working on the first Bravo Sierra products in 2018, my first thought was to give them a call and partner with them for our product lineup certification. The experience was great. It can be a long process as their auditors/consultants will review all documents pertaining to the products, from the formula to the packaging. It gets very detailed. They then visit in person the manufacturing facilities to audit the production process. It is a costly process and definitely an investment.

It was worthwhile. Third-party certifications are important to show our customers a transparent process and proof that we, as a company, walk the talk when it comes to sustainability. It's easy to make marketing and advertising claims. Having the Cradle to Cradle stamp on our product is whole different story!"

Contact: Cradle to Cradle monitors messages sent to the email address info@c2ccertified.orgon a daily basis. It also has an online certification inquiry form, which it generally will respond to within a day or two.

EN
COSMOS
Trust in organic and natural cosmetics
COSMOS ORGANIC
COSMOS NATURAL
ABOUT US
COSMOS-STANDARD
CERTIFICATION
CERTIFICATION BODIES
DOCUMENTS/DATABASES
CONTACT
NEWS
COSMOS CERTIFICATION
ORGANIC . NATURAL . CERTIFIED . APPROVED

COSMOS

COSMOS is an independent, international group that works with 10 leading organic and natural cosmetics associations and certifiers, including Ecocert. Although each certifier has its own standards, COSMOS aggregates their requirements into a universal standard across five categories: physically processed agricultural ingredients (a product must be at least 95% organic), chemically processed agricultural ingredients (the manufacturing process has to be clean and adhere to green chemistry principles), water, mineral ingredients and other ingredients.

Companies with COSMOS certification also need to have environmentally friendly packaging, and COSMOS has a list of packaging materials that it deems environmentally friendly such as cellulose, ceramic, glass and aluminum.

There are two COSMOS labels brands can obtain: COSMOS Organic and COSMOS Natural. Products with a COSMOS Organic label contain a minimum percentage of organic ingredients while products with a COSMOS Natural products comply with the standards, but don't meet the organic percentage minimums.

According to certification manager Christapor Koestline, each certification body approved by COSMOS is responsible for setting its own certification fees. "Ecocert is able to provide a competitive rate by having subsidiaries located internationally," he says. The timeline for certification can vary widely. However, in the United States, the process typically takes two to five months.

Brand experience: Terry Zickerman, founder and CEO of Love Sun Body, says, "When we founded Love Sun Body in 2012, we started researching active ingredients and inactive ingredients that would be safe and effective to formulate our sunscreens. We wanted to provide a consumer guarantee—a certification for organic and natural products that our clients would trust. We decided to work with Ecocert on certifying our products to the COSMOS standard because it covered sourcing of ingredients and verified the percentage of natural ingredients used in our products.

Initially, we thought that certifying natural ingredients that we sourced would provide assurance the ingredients were safe ingredients. What we learned is to certify natural and organic raw ingredients to the COSMOS standard, sourcing of our ingredients starts with the raw ingredients' origin and [how] they are processed, including the compositional breakdown of each ingredient to determine what percent of the formula is natural origin. This is why many consumer products do not state their percentage of natural origin due to the manufacturer not doing any analysis of the raw ingredients and cleaning ingredients.

Many consumers don't realize companies list natural ingredients on their products labeling, the percent of the product that is actually natural is not written on the packaging. Certification also includes sourcing and approval of our cleaning ingredients that are used before and after our products are made. The cleansing ingredients must be safe and not leave any trace residues in the final product.

Our initial COSMOS certification added two years to our product development. Annual fees, which include the above and annual audits, will be a minimum of $5,000 per year, and that will increase with the number of products certified. To achieve COSMOS certification, all raw ingredients, packaging, labeling and cleansing ingredients must be approved by one of the five founding members who authorize and oversee Cosmos certification. Ecocert is based in Europe, but conducts inspections in over 80 countries, making it one of the largest organic certification organizations in the world.

It is worthwhile for Love Sun Body because our clients are looking for us to provide them and their families truly clean and safe products that are third-party certified. It takes a significant amount of time and resources to source ingredients and packaging that meet the certification requirements and all the necessary documentation that's required for annual audits. The certification provides our clients a guarantee that Love Sun Body products are 100% natural."

Contact: American brands can reach out to certification manager Koestline at christaphor.koestline@ecocert.com. Brands in Canada can contact Kim Milesi at kim.milesi@ecocert.com. In the European Union, the contact is Stephanie Pouliquen at stephanie.pouliquen@ecocert.com.

EWG VERIFIED

According to Jocelyn Lyle, SVP for partnerships and development at Environmental Working Group (EWG), "By choosing an EWG Verified product, consumers can reduce their exposures to chemicals known to cause harm and support companies who are committed to using safer ingredients." She continues, "It's the only mark backed by EWG's scientific rigor and decades of research on chemical safety and scientific evidence on the impacts of exposure to toxic chemicals on human health."

To start the process of getting EWG Verified, brands must submit their products' ingredients to the organization. Its team of scientists and toxicologists will review the ingredients. The team checks the submissions against the EWG's published criteria, including a list of "unacceptable" and "restricted" ingredients. Brands must also submit additional documentation to verify product safety and comply with "strict label requirements," per Lyle.

For most brands, the application process can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks. There's a $250 evaluation fee for new formulations, and EWG offers a sliding scale for licensing costs based on brand revenue.

Brand Experience: Milena Placentile, founder of Just the Goods, says, "At Expo West, I attended an event where EWG Verified was introduced to the other makers present. What I liked the program was that it created a means by which EWG could position its rigorous scientific research and public education program to help it sustain capacity through a new revenue opportunity. So, for me, joining EWG was both to challenge to continue being a safe cosmetics champion as described by the now defunct Campaign for Safe Cosmetics organized by the Compact for Safe Cosmetics of which EWG was a founding member and a way to support EWG in a reciprocal fashion. I very deliberately don't sell through mass retailers, nor do I put too many logos on my intentionally very minimalist packaging, so I wasn't interested from a marketing perspective as much as I liked the challenge it presented. I believe Just the Goods was the 12th maker to be onboarded.

When the program was officially launched, I was invited via email to join. After reviewing the process and deciding to proceed, I filled out and had notarized the necessary paperwork, submitted formaulas for review, provided documentation of ingredients (i.e., certificates of analysis provided by my suppliers for each lot), filled out additional paperwork, updated my labels to their sepcifications, which overlapped very well with when I was planning to invest in redoing my labels anyway, and then commited to maintaining the records and paperwork required. At the time, I was offering around 140 formulas and working with only one shipping assistant. If someone has fewer products to consider and a member of staff deicated to working on this sort of thing, it could be done far faster than my process, that's for sure! In terms of cost, I've signed an NDA which prevents me from discussing this.

As mentioned earlier, my motivations were twofold: to challenge myself to continue making things that meet these rigorous standards and to support EWG, which I regard as an important source for peer-reviewed accurate scientific information regarding public/consumer health. For those reasons also, I feel it was worthwhile. Having the EWG Verified logo on the Skin Deep database has also been worthwhile. Over time, more and more people have come to learn about why safe ingredients matter for our physical and environmental health, especially when they are thinking about the long-term health of their children.

I've definitely been able to expand Just the Goods' reach thanks to my involvement in this program. EWG offers all sorts of opportunities such as inclusion in swag bags, promotional boxes, etc. However, since my products are handmade on an human/artisanal scale, I'm not usually able to make time/product to particiapte. Intentionally large-scale makers will likely see more benefit if their objective for joining is marketing. But, again, my objectives were more about verifiying my formula choices and supporting an organization I appreciate."

Contact: Brands interested in getting EWG Verified can email getthemark@ewg.org.

FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED

On the organization's website, it states purchasing a Fair Trade-certified product benefits the individual who made it as well as that individual's community. Fair Trade USA explains it certifies products that promote environmental stewardship, safe and healthy working conditions, and sustainable incomes for workers. Jodi Beasley, senior partnership development manager of packaged goods at the organization, says, "The cost, process and timeframe for certification depends on the commodities sourced and varies widely."

Brand experience: Brittnee Lethermon, founder and CEO of Yenisi Beauty, says, "As a world traveler, I have always been passionate about people and cultures. After living in two other continents besides North America, I learned that the privileges that we have are far superior to many countries around the world. In one country I visited a few years back, the living wage of a small fishing community was $27 per month. From my experience, I knew I wanted to buy ingredients from producers who actually made a living wage to provide for themselves and their families.

The Fair Trade certification process is much more simple than the USDA Certified Organic process. We had to make sure that we sourced fair trade certified ingredients that were compliant in their system, apply, and wait for approval. The process took no longer than one month. We received this certification almost three years ago, so the process might have changed since then. The cost was $1,000, not including yearly costs. I think it's worthwhile to give back to the communities that help our brand be what it is today. Our organic Shea + Cocoa Body Butter would not be one of our top sellers without us sourcing raw, organic, fair trade cocoa butter."

Jessica Waters, co-owner and creative director of Terralite, says, "Terralite is certified Fair Trade by Fair Trade USA for our tealight candles only. We invented our own wax to provide consumers with a plant-based, non-hydrogenated, sustainably sourced candle. It is a blend made with only two ingredients: rice bran wax and organic coconut oil. The coconut oil we use comes from certified fair trade farms and factories in the Philippines.

From a reporting perspective with regards to Fair Trade certification, these farms and factories are called 'producers' as they are the ones who grow the coconuts and extract the coconut oil. A 'buyer' (aka, a distributor), who is also Fair Trade certified, buys this coconut oil at a premium price from the producer and sells it to 'traders' like Terralite for use in manufacturing. All the buying and selling of Fair Trade goods, from each of these groups, is documented and reported to the certifying agency on a quarterly basis. We're proud to say we have the only fair trade candles on the market and the first to be certified by Fair Trade USA.

As for the certification process, first, determine if you have a product that qualifies for certification. Does your product contain ingredients that are already certified? What percentage of your products contain fair trade ingredients? In our case, we use fair trade organic coconut oil to make our tealights. Then, register your products with certifying agency. You have to disclose the percentage ingredients that are in the product unless the product is a single ingredient. Our 6-pack, 12-pack, 36-pack, 100-pack of tealights all are registered.

After registered, you have to submit label artwork to the agency for approval. Fair Trade statement, Fair Trade logo placement and size, percentage disclosure, etc., are all evaluated to ensure they meet requirements. Once your product and label is approved and you begin to sell your product, you are then required to report sales and purchases. In our case, we report quarterly all tealights sales as well as the amount of fair trade coconut oil we buy. This process is relatively the same for the entire production pipeline. It is designed to promote full transparency and tracking from farm to factory."

Contact: Beasley says, "The best thing an organization can do is visit our website for general information, and then reach out to me for a customized plan." She can be contacted at jbeasley@fairtradeusa.org.

THE MADE SAFE BANNED LIST SM
6500 ingredients prohibited from use in MADE SAFE® certified products
MADE SAFE
WWW.MADESAFE.ORG

MADE SAFE

Billed as "America's first nontoxic seal for products we use every day," a Made Safe label signifies that a product has been made with ingredients not known or suspected to damage human health. To earn a Made Safe Seal, products go through a 13-part certification process. Steps include submitting all the substances in a product. The ingredients are evaluated against Made Safe's proprietary Toxicant Database and its banned list of 6,500 substances. Substances not in the database must undergo a screening that checks for bioaccumulation, contamination, terrestrial toxicity, and other factors harmful to the health of humans and the environment.

Made Safe's rigorous certification process can take quite some time, even several years, according to the organization's website. "To work with Made Safe, companies must be prepared to take a journey to formulate even better products," the website advises. "It is rare for a company to have all products meet the certification guidelines out of the gate." Fees vary depending on the specific company applying for a certification and the number of products being certified.

Brand experience: Christine Martey-Ochola, co-founder of Nuele, says, "We chose Made Safe certification because it enabled us to present to the beauty industry and our clients the authenticity of our products and our commitment and dedication to clean beauty, sustainability, transparency and a need to differentiate from other products that make unverified claims.

The process was efficient. [It] took a few months primarily due to the growth plan of our company. The cost is something that Made Safe can articulate because I believe it is quite dependent on the number of products, ingredients and efforts that they need. What I will say is that, once a company reaches out to them, they will make an assessment and provide you with pricing for an annual license that aligns with your product category, ingredients, etc.

I would recommend reaching out to Made Safe to ask about certification costs so that they can give you an accurate range that would serve companies that are trying to make a decision on whether to engage or not. [It was] absolutely worthwhile because it enabled our company to have third-party verification and certification on the claims we were making for our products."

Contact info: Brands can start the certification process by emailing programs@nontoxiccertified.org.

LEAPING BUNNY

A Leaping Bunny certification signals that a product hasn't been tested on animals throughout any stage of its development. "Shoppers can be confident that the companies appearing on Leaping Bunny's list have met the strictest requirements among all cruelty-free certifications," says Kim Paschen, program manager at Leaping Bunny.

In order to get the certification, a company must be based in the United States or Canada, and sell its own line of personal care or household products. The company must also agree not to test its ingredients, formulations or finished products on animals, and work with suppliers and manufacturers that don't test on animals either.

The certification process begins with an application that determines whether or not a company qualifies for certification. Next, applicants create an account and fill out an application for approval, which is a detailed questionnaire. The applying company must ask manufacturers and suppliers to sign individual statements of assurance stating that no animal testing is used in the creation of the applying company's products. The next step is to await Leaping Bunny approval. The timeframe for the process depends on how quickly manufacturers and suppliers sign their declarations. According to Paschen, waiting for these signatures most frequently causes delays.

Companies that are Leaping Bunny certified must commit to the program annually to ensure current information, and certified companies must be willing to undergo an audit by an independent auditor to ensure cruelty-free operations. There's no cost to apply for certification or to be listed as a Leaping Bunny certified company on the Leaping Bunny website or on its app. However, brands that wish to license the Leaping Bunny logo for use on packaging must pay a one-time fee that ranges from $500 to $4,500 depending on a company's gross annual sales.

Brand experience: Pergrin Pervez, co-founder of Tribe, says, "Ensuring that Tribe products are cruelty-free and communicating the same to our clients is key to our values. Tribe researched this issue and elected to become Leaping Bunny certified as it is one of the highest and most stringent standards in the industry. The process includes validating that all of Tribe's products as well as our supply chain down to the individual ingredients were not tested on animals. This involved working in partnership with our lab and suppliers and facilitating the independent validation with Leaping Bunny program administrators. Once approved, we were given permission to state that Tribe products are Leaping Bunny certified and listed in the publicly available database for consumers to verify. There's no cost to apply and the licensing fee to use the Leaping Bunny logo is $500." The certification process took three months.

Contact: Brands can send questions about getting certified to admin@leapingbunny.org.

Microbiome®
friendly

MICROBIOME FRIENDLY

A Microbiome Friendly certification indicates that a product doesn't have a negative impact on the known microbes contained within the microbiome or culture of healthy bacteria on the skin. In essence, a Microbiome Friendly product is free from contamination. It allows bacteria that's specific to the area of the body that the product will go on to grow unharmed. It preserves the diversity of the microbiome on the skin where it is applied, and it doesn't suppress beneficial bacteria or foster harmful bacteria.

To get a certification, products must undergo testing that explore various ways in which a product can affect the microbiome. The process can take up to eight weeks. There's a fee for the product tests conducted in a lab and a license fee which applies after one year. Those exact fees are available upon request.

Elsa Jungman, founder of Dr. Elsa Jungman, says, "Our main objective was to launch a line of microbiome-friendly products. And as the founder and a scientist, it was essential to me to have relevant data to back up this claim. I met with Dr. Kristin Neumann, founder of MyMicrobiome, at a microbiome conference. We decided to partner together for our products to be certified. Kristin had just started this service and had validated in vitro testing at her lab in Germany to evaluate the impact of finished formulation on the skin microbiome.

I did this certification before raising my first round, and I could only afford only one certification. This one was the most important to me as it was also a real evaluation of the products. We were the first brand in the U.S. to get that certification, and it provided more trust to our customers who really care about protecting their skin microbiome.

It was an amazing experience and, since 2019, I have validated my whole line of products with MyMicrobiome, and I will continue in the future. As an early stage company, this certification for us is also part of our development testing. We can evaluate if our products are really microbiome friendly before launching.

It took just a few weeks to get the data and Kristin and her team have always been very responsive and able to adjust to startup needs. At the beginning, many outside players were skeptical about this approach, but now the certification has been used among brands, which is great.

I pay a small fee for testing and a licensing fee for the seal if we want to use it for marketing purposes. We had to send our ingredient list and some formulations to the lab in Germany. Kristin and her team would do a pre-test and, then, the full evaluation on bacteria and fungi strains. I would then receive the full report of the experimentation with our results and the seal if we wanted to get the license.

It was really worth it because, for us, beyond a certification, it was to get a test done to prove our claim with real scientific data made by a third-party lab, and it was much more affordable than doing it at a regular CRO as they specialized in that particular testing."

Contact: Brands can contact Christine Lemche-Auerbach at info@microbiome-friendly.com.

USDA
CERTIFIED
BIOBASED
PRODUCT
PRODUCT 90%
SAMPLE

USDA BIOPREFERRED

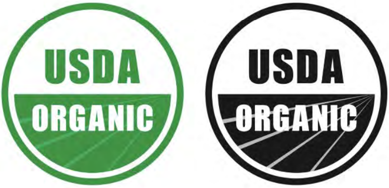
The USDA BioPreferred Program certifies products to become USDA Certified BioBased Products. It also certifies products that fall into one of 139 designated categories, including bath products, facial products and cosmetics, for preferred federal purchasing.

Depending on which category or categories a product falls into, it must meet minimum bio-based content requirements in order to get certified. Cosmetics, for example, must have a minimum of 25% bio-based content. Facial care products must have at least 88%. Products must also meet at least one of the organization's innovation criteria in order to be eligible for participation in the program. For example, materials that are manufactured or processed using renewable, biomass energy or using technology.

There's no cost to register products in the program's catalogue. However, if a brand would like to have a new product or formulation certified, sample testing will be required, and there will be a fee associated with the testing. Fees for lab testing vary, but typically are in the $400 range. The certification process generally takes about 90 days.

Brand experience: Fiona Chan, founder of Youthforia, says, "I like this program because, as part of its testing process, you submit your formulas to a testing lab, and they measure what percentage of the carbon of our formula is made from fossil fuels versus renewable ingredients. It's a very transparent way of highlighting our choice to not use fossil fuels, where possible. The percentage that is made out of renewable ingredients is then referred to as % bio-based. The certification itself doesn't have any fees, but the lab test does have a fee associated with it, which is several hundred dollars. The submitting of paperwork to USDA BioPreferred takes the most time. It's about several months where you're waiting to hear back so you have paperwork to submit to the lab. The actual lab testing and results takes a week."

Contact info: Brands can email the help desk at help@usdabiopreferred.com.



USDA ORGANIC

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (NOP), a federal regulatory program, verifies that personal care products made up of agricultural ingredients like honey and shea butter meet organic production, handling, processing and labeling standards. Beauty brands can submit their application to the NOP, where a certifying agent reviews and verifies the company's practice. The certifying agent will also conduct an on-site inspection before issuing an organic certification. CCOF is one example of a USDA NOP-accredited organic certification agency.

According to a representative for CCOF, "It is possible to certify personal care products as organic, but there is currently no regulation specific to organic personal care products. This means that [personal care products] must meet the same requirements as organic food."

Certified products can fall under three categories: 100% organic, organic, which means at least 95% of the product is organic, and made with organic ingredients, which means at least 70% of the product is organic. Products that bear a "made with organic ingredients" seal can't display the USDA organic seal.

The certification costs depend on the certifying agent and the size, type and operation complexity, and can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, according to the USDA. There are also typically fees for the application, annual renewal, inspection and assessment on annual production or sales. The length of time for certification varies depending on several factors, including the size of a business and its supply chain.

Brand experience: Yenisi Beauty's Lethermon says, "Since the planning stages of our brand, we have always used USDA-certified organic ingredients. We never cut corners in buying raw, quality ingredients. I've always wanted to have the USDA Organic certification because there are simply not enough beauty products on the market that offer real, nontoxic, conscious, certified organic ingredients. My goal was to be one of the first, if not the first Black- and female-owned beauty brands that was USDA Certified Organic. I wanted to pioneer 100% organic beauty at an affordable price.

The process took at least two years in regards to planning and finding the right certifying agency for our company. My husband/co-founder and I went back and forth contacting many agencies to fit our needs, time and budget. After finding the perfect fit, we created a clear step-by-step plan of our manufacturing processes and procedures to present to them. This process is referred to as the development of an Organic Systems Plan (OSP).

From start to finish of the initial application to receiving our certification was about three to four months. The cost was around $3,000, which does not include yearly costs. Beyond a shadow of a doubt it is worthwhile. We have many customers who suffer from eczema, psoriasis, dry skin, hair loss, hair breakage, and so much more who absolutely believe in our brand and what we do. We have given them even more confidence in our brand with our organic certification because we don't just 'talk' or 'claim' to have a few organic ingredients, we are completely certified by USDA Organic standards."

Contact info: Brands interested in organic certification can send an email to NOP.Guidance@usda.gov.

BEAUTY WITHOUT BUNNIES

Awarded by PETA, the Beauty Without Bunnies seal indicates that a product hasn't been tested on animals. Products that aren't tested on animals and don't contain any animal byproducts may apply for an "animal-test free and vegan" certification.

According to Catie Cryar, assistant manager at PETA, the certification process starts with submitting a legally binding statement of assurance signed by a brand's CEO, which verifies that a brand and its suppliers don't conduct, commission, pay for or allow any animal-testing for ingredients, formulations or finished products anywhere in the world.

Brands must also submit detailed paperwork that discloses how their products are tested and where they're sold along with the types of products they sell and the kinds of ingredients they use. Brands must have an agreement in place with all suppliers to ensure that no animal testing is done at any stage of the production process or on ingredients or raw materials that go into products. "Many of the 'bans' on animal tests for cosmetics have loopholes that allow for testing under certain circumstances, but PETA doesn't have any loopholes," says Cryar.

It's free to apply to the certification program and get certified. However, brands that choose to use PETA's global "animal test-free" or "animal test-free and vegan" logos must pay a one-time $350 licensing fee. It takes PETA anywhere from one to three weeks to review and approve an application.

Brand experience: Courtney Baber, Co-Founder of The Route, says," Obtaining the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) Beauty without Bunnies certification mark license agreement was a non-negotiable for The Route. In addition to being cruelty-free, the brand is vegan, gluten-free and clean certified with all of our retail partners and has an extensive no-no ingredient list that you can find on our website. These are all extremely important brand pillars for our retail partners as well, including Ulta, Dermstore and HSN.

Becoming certified starts with ensuring your cosmetic chemist is aligned during the product development and formulation process. To qualify, PETA requires that you provide a statement of assurance that you as a brand do not conduct or commission any animal testing on ingredients, formulations or finished products and pledge never to do so in the future. Once you sign this assurance and pay a one time registration fee of $100, you have the ability to use the PETA logo on product packaging, displays and advertising material. The process to become PETA certified is fairly simply as long as you have done the heavy lifting upfront during product development."

Contact info: Brands can email BeautyWithoutBunnies@peta.org.

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Certificate

The CosmEthically ACTIVE certificate defines natural, ethical and active cosmetics with a special emphasis on evidence, physiological compatibility and the rational formulating.

It is the first certificate that pursues an integral approach to the evaluation of cosmetics. It reviews a cosmetic product by the origin of the ingredients, level of physiological compatibility, concentration of the cosmetically active ingredients and the science-based evidence behind them, principles of rational formulating and non-misleading, ethical claims.

Scientific evaluation

The main step during the certification process is the expert assessment of a cosmetic product, made by cosmetology scientists.

COSMETHICALLY ACTIVE

A CosmEthically Active certification, according to the organization's website, is reserved for "natural, ethical and active cosmetics with a special emphasis on evidence, physiological compatibility and the rational formulating." Katja Kladnik, a representative for the organization, says, "The selection of individual cosmetic ingredients in the product should be evidence-based. Cosmetically active ingredients must be incorporated at active concentrations that have been proven to express desired cosmetic effects after application, or the desired action may be predictable based on the ingredient's chemistry when scientific evidence regarding cosmetic activity is not available. That means that all the marketing claims should be based on the formulation itself, concentrations of the active ingredients, and that the products shouldn't only make promises but actually keep them."

The number of ingredients in a product should be minimal to avoid redundancy, and the organization also ensures that products are "highly compatible with our skin and friendly to animals," according to Kladnik. On average, the certification process takes about two to three months. "It usually takes the longest for brands to prepare and send us the necessary documentation regarding the products ingredients," says Kladnik. The cost to certify is 350 euros, excluding VAT, or nearly $410 at the current exchange rate. The certification is granted to brands for two years. Brands that choose to certify more than one product are typically entitled to discounts, which can be discussed with the organization at the outset of the certification process.

Brand experience: Grace O'Sullivan, co-founder of Avoila, says, "CosmEthically Active first reached out to us after seeing our product and our minimal ingredient list. After speaking with them in detail about their process, we understood that this organization was created to bring real scientific value to products like ours. We sent Avoila to their lab along with information from our manufacturer about our ingredients and eagerly waited for the results."

Kristy Hunston, O'Sullivan's co-founder at Avoila, continues, "Prior to starting the process with CosmEthically Active we had finalized the registration of our product with the European Union and U.K., so this helped the process tremendously because we had all of our ingredient paperwork in order. Without a Product Information File, it would have taken us a lot longer."

O'Sullivan adds, "The entire process took about four months, including signing documents, gathering information and shipping product. The certification analysis itself took three months. I loved the idea of having a trusted organization look at our formulation in detail and scrutinize the value of our product in a scientific way to prove that plant-based skincare can have proven benefits for your skin. They check the concentrations of the ingredients in the product and then compare them to concentrations that studies proved are effective."

Hunston emphasizes, "It allows us to elevate the conversation with our consumers about the effectiveness of plant-based products."

Contact: Indie brands can reach out to Katja Kladnik at katja.kladnik@cosmethicallyactive.com.

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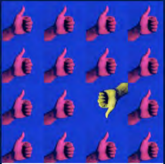

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