

A close-up photograph of a Stevia plant. The image shows several clusters of small, light green, fuzzy buds and two fully bloomed white flowers with five petals and yellow centers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

# *Stevia*

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# THE SWEET STEVIA CONSPIRACY

BY TOM THEIMER

Stevia, a plant once banned and confiscated in the U.S. during the 80's & 90's because it had non-toxic and sweet-tasting leaves, has a story all its own. Even Stevia's own printed story was at one time seized by the FDA in Dallas with the intent to burn the publications.

## Competition for Market Share

For me, the story of Stevia begins at the time of the Ford Administration during the early 70's, shortly after Ford pardoned Nixon for his crimes. Donald Rumsfeld is the Secretary of Defense, while Dick Cheney serves as Chief of Staff under President Ford. Then President Carter takes office in 1977. So, where do fellows like Rumsfeld and Cheney go when they are not a part of their party's political arena and need jobs? Cheney eventually becomes CEO of Haliburton (a billion dollar defense contracting firm). For the first time in 20 years Donald Rumsfeld moves into the private sector. He takes the CEO position of G.D. Searle in 1977. (PBS Rumsfeld's War)



G. D. Searle was millions of dollars in debt. It had been working on an artificial sweetener, aspartame (NutraSweet). However, the scientific research being conducted by the FDA, Searle labs, and independent researchers was showing definite signs of toxicity. Six of seven monkeys had seizures, with one dying in Searle's own study. Rats developed brain tumors. A variety of neurological problems kept cropping up in test animals. [This neurological aspect now is suspected with often causing Multiple Sclerosis.] Also, research was demonstrating how aspartame was actually "eating holes in the brain", much like MSG (which had been voluntarily pulled from baby food in the early seventies because it was causing mental retardation). The current list of aspartame links to human ailments is too numerable to mention. Aspartame can even serve as an effective Fire Ant poison. (Theimer –see Appendix A) (Mercola, Pearsall - Chapter 3) (Sweet Misery) (Food For Thought)

In the late 70's, G. D. Searle was in the midst of criminal indictments because of its covertly masked false reports on aspartame. However, the chief Federal prosecutor on the case, Samuel Skinner, and later his assistant attorney, were hired by Searle's own law firm. Thus, the case was dropped. Years later, Skinner becomes the Secretary of Transportation followed by becoming Chief of Staff under H. W. Bush. (Mercola, Pearsall - Chapter 3) (Sweet Misery) (Food For Thought)

By 1980, research definitely demonstrated aspartame as unsafe for broad public consumption. The marketing of aspartame/NutraSweet seemed impossible. Again, remember that Donald Rumsfeld was serving as CEO of G. D. Searle. Also, Ronald Reagan was running for President around this time. Donald Rumsfeld had been tentatively slated to be Reagan's Vice President. However, at the very last moment a turn of events put H. W. Bush as Reagan's Vice Presidential candidate instead of Rumsfeld. (PBS Rumsfeld Wars)

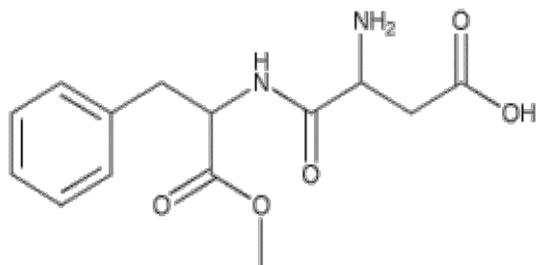
Rumsfeld was owed a Reagan favor. The day after taking office in 1981, President Reagan issued an unprecedented executive order suspending the authority of the current FDA commissioner to take actions. Reagan's newly appointed FDA commissioner, Arthur Hayes, manipulated the system and approved the marketing of aspartame despite the FDA's own scientific evidence demonstrating it as unsafe. In 1983, Hayes leaves the FDA to work as a thousand dollar per day consultant for Searle's public relations firm. In fact, no less than seven "fast track" approving, FDA officials later leave to work in high-paying aspartame related industries. (Mercola, Pearsall – Chapter 3) (Sweet Misery) (Food For Thought)

### Washington's Revolving Doors

During 1983 while still CEO of Searle, Rumsfeld travels to Iraq visiting with Saddam Hussein in order to pave the way for later U. S. weapons sales to Iraq, (4 billion dollars in chemical and biological weapons). (PBS Rumsfeld Wars) In 1985, G. D. Searle is sold to Monsanto. Rumsfeld profits millions. Monsanto, which started in 1901 solely to market saccharin, an artificial sweetener, has a reputation well expressed by the Organic Consumers Association: "If you are talking about PCBs, Agent Orange, Bovine Growth Hormone, water privatization, biopiracy, untested/unlabeled genetically engineered organisms, or persecuting small family farmers, you're talking about the Monsanto Corporation." (History of Aspartame) (Mercola, Pearsall 21, 140) (Monsanto Corporate History) Financial muscle is beyond the imagination considering the fact that Pharmacia Upjohn owns Monsanto. Also, Monsanto often coordinates business activities with other behemoths like Eli Lilly. Monsanto has a huge reputation for being a "revolving door" between corporate executive positions and influential government jobs/White House appointments. These trade-off, corporate-positions in exchange for government-agency favoritism number in the dozens; and they can be a "Who's Who" of White House cabinet members. Not only are there many types of other covert and corrupt governmental influences from Monsanto, but there is also the manipulated media and publishing censorship which have undeniably suppressed the documented health hazards of Monsanto's products. (e.g. Fox News Reporters prohibited from revealing Monsanto's own documents of cancer-causing products in milk. Also rejection of manuscripts in the book publishing industry because Monsanto's name is mentioned.) The broad, general public commonly underestimates just how insanely rampant and prolific this insidious government/corporate/media corruption is. There are phenomenal conflicts of public interest which are not well-revealed. (Mercola, Pearsall 19-285) (Sweet Misery) (DORway.com) (the Corporation) (Smith) (Orwell Rolls in His Grave) (The Future of Food) (The GMO Trilogy) (Food For Thought)

### The Sweetener Industry

The artificial sweetener industry is an international, multi-billion dollar business with a very, very high profit margin. In 1985, sales of aspartame in the United States were about three quarters of a billion dollars. (Stevia Co. Annual Report) (Mercola, Pearsall)



In order to fully understand the story of Stevia and what starts to transpire in 1985, it is important to view the previous mitigating circumstances.

## The Herb

Stevia is a shrub native to the northern parts of South America, where it is a perennial. It is well-known for its sweet tasting leaves which have been estimated to be from 15 to more than 200 times sweeter than sugar, varying in its sweetness depending upon the plant, harvest time, conditions, extracts, and the “estimator”. Stevia has probably more than 150 species. However, the species rebaudiana is known for the sweeter leaves. It is grown commercially in South and Central America and also in the Far East. More detailed information, taxonomy, horticultural aspects, and photos are available in the Appendices. (Taxonomy Appendix D) (Photos Appendix B) (Nortex – Appendix C) (rain-tree)



For hundreds of years the indigenous peoples of the regions around northern Brazil utilized Stevia. Not only did it make for an excellent sweetener, but it also had medicinal qualities which are still employed today by the traditional medical practices of Brazil and Paraguay. The sweetener can boast “no calories, no carbohydrates”, along with balancing blood sugar levels. In fact, some of its nutrients, (such as Niacin, chromium, zinc, magnesium, manganese, potassium, selenium), help to regulate metabolism. Stevia tends to lower blood sugar, increase urination, and dilate blood vessels while lowering blood pressure. It can be used to reduce inflammations and to help heal wounds. Stevia also can help to kill bacteria, viruses, and fungi. As an herbal remedy, it has been used to treat obesity, sweet cravings, depression, hypertension, fatigue, diabetes, high acid urine levels, heartburn, heart difficulties, and many other ailments. (rain-tree) (Steviainfo)

There have been numerous studies on this plant and its constituents. Over one hundred chemicals have been identified. A variety of unique chemicals have been isolated which have a glucose or sugary sweetness. “Stevioside” has been called the sweetest of these chemical compounds and is said to be 300 times sweeter than table sugar. Typically it will make up from 6-18% of the leaf. Studies have also been conducted using some of these chemical extracts, and they have shown some promising results in assisting with different ailments. There are more than 200 published scientific studies which affirm the safety of Stevia. (Steviainfo) (rain-tree)

## Commercial Demand for Stevia

Japan stands out as the epitome of safety in the public consumption of Stevia. The plant and its extracts have been used as a sweetener for foods and beverages since the 1970’s after many initial safety studies were conducted. By the late 1980’s, Stevia was outselling other artificial sweeteners (such as Aspartame/ NutraSweet) in Japan. This fact is significant to note. The plant was now leading in the market share of the sweetener industry. An unpatentable plant was beating out a patented product. If this market force was occurring in Japan, it certainly could occur in the United States. (Bonvie) (Strubbe) (Martini) (rain-tree) (Mercola, Pearsall)

1984, just prior to Monsanto's buyout of aspartame in 1985. Jim May had an herbal company in Arizona. He took samples of a product containing the Stevia leaf and its concentrate to the local FDA office to see if the plant leaves and concentrate were okay to import. The local FDA was very friendly and said that there was absolutely no problem on importing the leaves and product. However, the local FDA office later received a Washington mandate to halt the import of Stevia as a natural sweetener. Jim was told by the friendly local office: "...none of us here wants to do it. But the Washington office has demanded that we stop you from importing your stevia concentrate. . . . We're not telling you there's anything wrong with it [or] that anybody has had a problem. There's no complaint other than the NutraSweet Company; they are the ones who complained that you are selling a natural sweetener that hadn't had to go through all the testing and so forth." (Bonvie)

### **FDA Raids and Regulations**

In the late 80's, a whole host of companies in the United States started having surprising, unexpected difficulties from the FDA. Hundreds of tons of Stevia were being imported at this time. Tea companies such as Lipton, Celestial Seasonings, and Traditional Medicinals had significant inventories of tea sweetened with Stevia. Warehouse raids occurred and inventory was seized and destroyed. Throughout the country, consumable products containing Stevia were aggressively searched for. Once discovered, all product was seized. The injustices and weird scenarios could fill a book. Finally, an official ban on the import of Stevia was implemented in 1991. (Bonvie) (Martini) (Strubbe) (rain-tree) (Mercola, Pearsall)

Between 1991 and 1994, one possibly could purchase Stevia in a package which labeled it as a "cosmetic". In 1994, the legal status of Stevia changed quite by accident. Congress had passed legislation regarding dietary supplements. Stevia could now legally be sold in the United States for consumption if it was labeled "dietary supplement". However, any reference to it being used as a natural sweetener could bring about legal confiscation. Ed Johnson, prior U.S. Assistant Attorney for the Western District of Texas, is a victim of aspartame poisoning. He states that the FDA does "not allow Stevia to be labeled, advertised, or promoted as a sweetener." Some products currently "cross the line" into gray areas with reference to Stevia's sweetness. This message of "sweet" in the marketplace is sometimes allowed due to a lack of enforcement. The advent of internet sales also has a bearing upon this enforcement factor. (Mercola, Pearsall) (Bonvie) (Sweet Misery)

The Dallas FDA office raided Stevita Company in Arlington, Texas during the summer of 1998. The company was ordered to destroy its books concerning Stevia. One was a cookbook. Another book told the story of Stevia, much like this article. [There goes our First Amendment.] Oscar Rodes, president of Stevita Company, previously had been a victim of an FDA raid in 1991. They had seized a sizable amount of inventory in that surprise raid. He points out how there had been neither forewarning nor indication whatsoever at that time of any type of product violation. (Bonvie) (Strubbe)

The 1994 classification as a "dietary supplement" puts Stevia close to a similar ranking as vitamins. This is an ambiguous legal dilemma for FDA policy. Countless dollars in legal fees have been spent on this issue of Stevia. Petitions and volumes of documents have been presented to the FDA, but to no avail. (rain-tree) (Bonvie) (Mercola, Pearsall)



This is my story of Stevia, a plant so sweet that it brought out all the bitter corruption and deceit within our own government and corporate America. We can not rely upon the conventional mainstream media to tell this story. I plead with the reader to pass this story on. Only by raising a voice against corruption and injustice, can we put an end to it. If we do not speak against it, we can expect more of the same.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Fire Ant Experiment**

Started on Tuesday 9/19/06 - put aspartame (Nutra-Sweet) on mounds of Fire Ants.

#### **FIRE ANTS & NUTRA-SWEET:**

I do a lot of first-hand experiments. On 9/19/06, I covered mounds of Fire Ants with packets of Nutra-Sweet (aspartame) – see white powder. Wrappers of packets on lower right of bottom picture.





On 9/26/06, one week later, I am running my hand in the mounds. No Fire Ants. Never do this around children nor pets. Aspartame and other artificial sweeteners can be extremely toxic. The only reason it is on the market is because of Donald Rumsfeld's political clout as CEO of the company in 1980 to have it approved despite 15 years of FDA denial due to its health dangers. Can cause brain tumors, MS, lupus, and many other symptoms. See Google Video "Sweet Misery". I suspect that the methanol by-product of aspartame could be a factor in obliterating the Fire Ants.



## Appendix B

### Nortex Wholesale Nursery

January 26, 2007

I had decided that I would write my research paper for Biology on the plant "Stevia". In the few years prior to returning to college I had spent time tending my organic garden. Often, I would make notes of suppliers of seeds and plants. Nortex Greenhouses was in my notes as a supplier of herbs for Wholefoods and Calloways. In fact, at one time I had purchased a Stevia plant to see how it would grow in my garden.

In mid-January I called Nortex Nursery several times (located at 1300 West Brown in Wylie, TX - 972-442-5451). I finally got a hold of the grower in charge of herbs, Tammy. She was very friendly and we set up Friday, January 26th as a time for me to meet with her.

It was pleasant weather on the 26th when I pulled up in front of a huge patch of Rosemary there at Nortex Nursery. The receptionist in the office, Nature (her real name), called over the radio for Tammy. Nature told me that Nortex employed more than 60 people, many who have been there for more than a decade.

Finally, Tammy arrived and greeted me. She proceeded to take me to the herbal greenhouses. I was so curious about the facility that she ended up giving me almost an hour tour. While walking we talked. Tammy already had a degree in medical Biology, but had returned to college at A & M - College Station, to get her degree in horticulture. She just loves her job and her choice of career change. She was recruited by Nortex on campus. Later, she gave an open invitation for any college students to visit the facility. Students can also request certain "experiments" in growing procedures with a small plot of plants being maintained on premises by the nursery in order to compare results. She pointed out how such research could also benefit the nursery.

The facility sits on 49 acres with about 250,000 square feet under roof of greenhouse space. It is located only a few miles from downtown Wylie. A back acre had been donated to the city in exchange for cooperation with a water tank supply.

We talked the entire time, all the while I am trying to take in all the information. She gave me a tour of the entire facility.

I was astounded when I walked into the potting room. Here was a machine with a hopper for the potting mix which "dumped" the mix into the empty containers as they moved across a conveyer belt. Ladies on all sides were inserting cuttings into the mix as they moved along the belt. It was at an extremely rapid pace. Tammy informed me that they no longer use Styrofoam (at her urging) in the mix. Rice hulls are used instead and actually serve better as a medium. Peat is also used in the mix.

Sometimes, depending upon the plant, a cutting is dipped in a rooting stimulator. Many times nothing is used. An interesting note is that at one time, they often would use rubbing alcohol to clean the cutting. (Rubbing alcohol dries quickly.) However, with the Homeland Security regulations now, it requires special permits in order to obtain barrels of rubbing alcohol. So, the nursery decided to no longer mess with ordering it.

For the seed starters, there are also the pre-made trays. The trays come in shipped with vermiculite as a medium. Each tray is about 18" by 24", but contains about 240 pockets. Seeds are started in these pockets. When the plant reaches the appropriate size, the tray is placed onto a machine. The machine pushes and punches up from the bottom of the tray so that the plug of the young plant remains uninjured and intact within the medium.

Tammy also pointed out how they acclimate plants on a gradient to a different quantity of light or location in their growing process.

Organics and responsible growing methods. Here is where I was extremely impressed! I told Tammy that I was always concerned about buying herbs which were not labeled as organic. Not only am I concerned about pesticide residues, but I certainly did not want the nutrient content of the plant to be affected by synthetic chemical fertilizers. I was thrilled by the information which followed.

Tammy agreed with me entirely as she had the same concerns. She explained that all the plant mediums and fertilizing are natural, non-synthetic chemical mixes. No herbs ever come in contact with synthetic chemical pesticides. Great measures are made to ensure that they are not even exposed to residues of other plants which may have been sprayed. The only reason why they can not certify their plants as organic is because of this technical detail: their herbal greenhouses are not located at a remote distance from the other greenhouses which on occasion are sprayed.

It gets better. I understand a huge concern of nurseries. An infestation of a pest could breed and proliferate with the confined greenhouses, especially in a facility of this magnitude. This could wipe out thousands and thousands of dollars worth of plants. However, Tammy took me to their pesticide storage closet. I was floored. It was smaller than a one car garage with sparsely stocked shelves and NO ODOR of that "retail garden-center smell of pesticides". There was good reason. They had just a few small bottles of chemical pesticides. There were the natural pesticide controls also available on the shelves. Most homeowners have more chemical pesticides in their garage than this 49 acre facility. This was dynamically impressive for a nursery of this size! She explained their spraying procedure on some of the non-herbal plants and how it is kept to a bare minimum with the latest, least toxic environmentally friendly pesticides. Areas are enclosed when sprayed so as to keep it confined. Around this point of the tour, I also had the opportunity to meet with the general manager of the facility. She also stressed their philosophy of trying to run the nursery in the most responsible ways possible in respect to health and the environment.

Tammy gave me a couple flats of Stevia. She refused to invoice me, so I slipped her a big bill and told her to put it in their coffee fund. She had explained to me some of the difficulties that they had in growing different plants. The cuttings from the Stevia seemed to take okay. However, the mother plants seemed to stress and start to wilt. They have been at odds on how to handle this issue. Growing Stevia from seed is often uncertain. One alternative which they are looking at is to special order a certain type of Stevia cutting from an Australian company, but the costs are high. Tammy also explained that Stevia seems to do well in moderate temperatures (68-72 F) and moderate light. There are times when the plant will "dry-up" its leaves and look like it is dying. Then later, it will revive again. The plants that I was given had little white flowers on some. I tasted one of the leaves. I noticed that it was not quite as intensely sweet as the one I had had growing in my garden one summer. With the following days in February of cold weather, it has been a challenge to keep my nursery plants well maintained while at college.

I wanted to share this adventure of Nortex nursery. Also, I wanted to promote the fact that their herbs are organic from a pragmatic point of view.

## Appendix C

### Taxonomy

Domain	Eukarya
Kingdom	Plantae
Division	Magnoliophyta
Class	Magnoliopsida
Order	Asterales
Family	Asteraceae (A common trait with this Family are the florets*.)
Genus	Stevia
Species	rebaudiana (There are around 150 species of Stevia.)

Around the later 16th century, Spanish observers wrote about Stevia. The name of “Stevia” was probably given to the plant in honor of a Spanish botanist, P. J. Esteve, who lived during that period. In the later 1800’s, Dr. Moises Santiage Bertoni began researching the plant and its chemical properties. The Species’ label of “rebaudiana” came from the name of a chemist assisting with isolating the sweet factors. One can often see in publications the full name of “Stevia rebaudiana Bertoni”.

### Some Horticulture Notes



As a Dicot, notice the “five star” flower and also the netlike leaves.\* In our Texas climate, plants do not survive the winter, which I found out by experiment in my home organic garden. In South America, this plant is perennial. It is stated that Stevia prefer a more acidic, well drained soil. However, I have had success in seeing my garden plant survive despite the alkaline soil and only about 3-5 hours of sun a day...and in the Texas summer heat and neglected watering. My home plant actually had much, much sweeter leaves during late Summer and early Fall as opposed to the less mature nursery plants. My nursery plants have bloomed twice between January and April. Plants can reach about 2-3 feet tall. They actually prefer a temperature near 70 degrees with at least 6-8 hours of sun.

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### **Photo Credits**

**[Personal photos of the author as well as the two below.]**

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### **About the Author**

Tom Theimer is a student at Texas A & M, majoring in Environmental Studies. He did this paper as a project for the biology class.