

# REVIEW P&C

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*Improving skin  
health by promoting  
indigenous plants and  
traditional knowledge  
in South Africa.*



**BOTANICA**  
— NATURAL PRODUCTS —

**Manufacturing partners *you can trust***

**Supercharged solutions *for ethnic care***

**Value-engineering *in the home care segment***

# People, plants and the personal care equation

Harnessing South Africa's rich biodiversity, Botanica Natural Products (Botanica) aims to improve skin health by promoting the sustainable use of indigenous plants and local traditional knowledge.

*Bulbine frutescens* plants are harvested in Botanica's 10 hectare field



*Bulbine frutescens* bears a delicate and beautiful flower



Botanica processes the leaves of the plant to harvest the gel

This award-winning, family owned, social enterprise is located in rural Limpopo, South Africa. Established in 2009, Botanica specialises in identifying, producing and supplying indigenous plant extracts in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner to markets in Africa, Europe, the US and Asia.

The company is led by an experienced team. Michel Colson, Botanica's co-founder and technical director, has more than 45 years' experience in the personal care industry. He brings extensive business acumen to Botanica garnered during his tenure as MD of one of Unilever's chemical companies, Unichema France. Also of great benefit to the business is Colson's established global network of clients and colleagues in the personal care, cosmetics and chemical industries.

Will Coetsee, Botanica's MD, holds a bachelor's degree in biodiversity and an MBA in social enterprise. He has been at the helm of the business since its inception, and is recognised as a specialist in social enterprise. Coetsee's experience has been essential in enabling the development of Botanica's production facility, the procurement of

sustainable raw ingredients and in securing its strong customer base.

## Building the business

Botanica's main business activity is the cultivation of the indigenous South African plant, *Bulbine frutescens*. The active ingredient, BotanicaTimola, is sold to cosmetics producers for use in topical applications. According to Colson,

BotanicaTimola has been tested for toxicology and stability in Europe, and has been approved according to EU regulatory standards for cosmetics.

Although there is substantial traditional knowledge associated with the use of *Bulbine frutescens* in South Africa, the commercialisation of the plant is a world first as no commercial scale production has previously been undertaken.

Discussing the history of the business and how it came about, Coetsee comments: 'In 2009, we formed a joint venture partnership with a leading German cosmetics ingredient supplier and established a 10 hectare plantation as well as an 810m<sup>2</sup> processing facility. The development was made possible by the financial assistance

## DID YOU KNOW

In keeping with its focus to produce organically certified plant extracts for the cosmetics industry, Botanica also imports 100 per cent pure organically certified Argan oil from Morocco and has recently started producing organically certified Moringa oil.

of the Dutch government's Private Sector Investment scheme, which is aimed at developing sustainable triple bottom line enterprises in developing countries.'

### Tracking traditional uses

*Bulbine frutescens* occurs throughout South Africa. 'It has well documented traditional knowledge uses,' says Colson, 'regarding the gel found in the leaves of the plant, which has healing, soothing, moisturising and natural anti-bacterial properties.'

The plant has been used in southern African traditional medicine as an effective remedy for a number of topical ailments, including blemishes, cuts, wounds, stings, scars, burns, external sores, ringworm, rashes, eczema and psoriasis among others.

Through the commercialisation process, Botanica has developed and patented the extraction technique of the water-based gel. This is to ensure the product can be marketed to the cosmetics industry as an active ingredient. The agricultural process used to produce *Bulbine frutescens* is also certified organic by Ecocert.

### Community capacity building

Part of Botanica's strategy is to be a globally recognised supplier of premium, organically certified cosmetics ingredients from South Africa. It achieves this by operating as a social enterprise, which focuses equally on social development, environmental sustainability and financial viability. 'We view the promotion of traditional knowledge as the key to our success,' comments Coetsee. 'For this reason, Botanica has applied for a Bio-Prospecting permit from the Department of Environmental Affairs and has concluded an Access and Benefit Sharing Agreement with a local non-profit company. This is to ensure the community benefits equitably from our operations.'

The company operates in a remote, rural part of South Africa's poorest province, Limpopo, offering sustainable income to 25 full-time employees, who are mostly women. 'The positive spin off ensures a stable income and a higher standard of living for more than 120 local people,' he adds. 'Our employees also receive on-the-job training, workshops focused on first aid, business development, HIV/Aids awareness and family planning.'

### Ethical at heart

Botanica operates according to the highest ethical standards and ensures that ethical practices exist throughout the value chain, from production to end-use. Its organic production methods also ensure the preservation of biodiversity. 'Our cultivation methods are free from pesticides or inorganic fertilisers. Post production, the pressed plant material is used to produce organic compost, which is then used in

### READY FOR TAKEOFF

BotanicaTimola is marketed to brand owners and manufacturers of cosmetics for use in a variety of products focused on soothing and moisturising claims. Suitable applications include after sun lotion, bar soap, body wash, anti-itch shampoo, scalp spray, nappy rash cream, after shave gel, anti-itch lotion and post-hair relaxer applications. The ingredient has also undergone required safety and stability tests in the EU, and conforms to the highest international standards for cosmetics raw materials. Furthermore, efficacy trials on BotanicaTimola are currently being conducted in Europe and South Africa.

our agricultural production, thereby closing the energy loop without waste,' says Coetsee. 'Ultimately we aim to offer a carbon-neutral product. To achieve this, the company has established a plantation of 250 000 Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*) trees, which offset our carbon emissions and reduce soil erosion. Spekboom is an indigenous South African tree species that captures carbon dioxide and converts it to oxygen 24 hours a day. The plant is also drought resistant and very hardy, making it perfect for this application in this location.'

The company has also reduced its energy consumption by switching to alternative energy sources and by employing methods to harvest rainwater for irrigation and production purposes.

As a result of these and other ongoing efforts, Botanica has won several awards. These include the Indigenous Plant Use Forum's Best Indigenous plant product for 2014; the SEED Initiative's Social Enterprise and Accelerator Awards; and an AfricaGrowth Institute Business Innovation Award. •

**Botanica Natural Products**  
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The organic *Bulbine frutescens* plants are washed before processing

*BotanicaTimola has been tested for toxicology and stability in Europe, and has been approved according to EU regulatory standards for cosmetics*



Every batch of BotanicaTimola is specification and microbiology tested in Botanica's in-house laboratory