What do the experts say?

Herbal Dietary Supplements, DNA Barcode Testing and Results from the New York Attorney General’s Office

“The FDA does not currently use DNA sequencing for dietary supplement ingredient verification, but is actively working toward developing validated methods for plant identification, for use by both industry and the agency...

“[FDA is] working on building a library of DNA sequences for plants, but this project is not complete. The agency currently uses chemical markers or fingerprints when it performs ingredient verification.”

—FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, “The Tan Sheet”

“These results do not ring true to me...The FDA spot checks hundreds of companies, and most mainstream companies check that they put the correct plant substance into their products. So it’s unbelievable that almost 8 in 10 products tested by the attorney general would not even contain the correct plant. On the surface, something is terribly wrong with these results."

—Pieter Cohen, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, Prevention

"...[T]his recent analysis was not a reliable way to look for them in extracts. You can’t reliably say whether or not there is a problem just because DNA was not found."

—Tod Cooperman, M.D., president of ConsumerLab, Prevention

"There exist accepted methods for testing herbal products, and one of these should have been used in addition to DNA to confirm the results."

—Tieraona Low Dog, M.D., former director of the Fellowship at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, University of Arizona, Prevention

"We raised the question if any of these products are extracts, and if so, what other analytical technologies were used to help ensure the validity of the results obtained by DNA testing...

"DNA testing seldom is able to properly identify chemically complex herbal extracts, because often DNA doesn't get through the extraction process."

—Mark Blumenthal, founder and director, American Botanical Council, AP

"My suspicion is that inappropriate methods were used to assess these products, leading to some false-negative results...A lack of DNA...is not necessarily indicative of a mislabeled supplement."

—Danica Harbaugh Reynaud, Ph.D., CEO, AuthenTechnologies, LiveScience.com