

Calorie-free natural sweetener moves one step closer to use in the U. S.

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Researchers in Georgia are reporting an advance toward the possible use of a new natural non-caloric sweetener in soft drinks and other food products in the United States. Stevia, which is 300 times more potent than sugar but calorie-free, is already used in some countries as a food and beverage additive to help fight obesity and diabetes. Their study is scheduled for the October 8 issue of *ACS' Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.

Indra Prakash, John F. Clos, and Grant E. DuBois note that so-called stevia sweeteners, derived from a South American plant, have been popular for years as a food and beverage additive in Latin America and Asia. But several factors have prevented its use as a sweetener in Europe and the United States. Those include concerns about safety and hints that exposure to sunlight degrades one of the key components of stevia.

In research that eases concerns about stevia's stability, the scientists studied clear glass containers of cola and lemon-lime sodas containing the two major naturally sweet components in stevia. After exposing the beverages to sunlight for one week, they found no significant degradation in either component of the natural sweetener.

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