Hoodia Gordonii

Currently there is a major breakthrough on the weight loss front as South African researchers did research on the food eaten by the San people. They discovered they did eat parts of the Hoodia cactus to suppress their appetite during hunting trips. The UK company Phytopharm obtained the license for patented P57, the appetite-suppressing ingredient of the cactus and sold the rights to license the drug for $21m to Pfizer, the US pharmaceutical giant known for supplying e.g. Viagra. After legal problems with the original inventors of the food (the San people) Phytopharm on paying the San people a commission on all sales so the market is now open for a drug version of the cactus. As you will understand this drug will cause quite a wave on the weightloss market the coming years. Below you will find some info on this exciting development.

Thousands of patents on African plants have been filed. To name just a few: brazzeine, a protein 500 times sweeter than sugar from a plant in Gabon; teff, the grain used in Ethiopia's flat "injera" bread; thaumatin, a natural sweetener from a plant in West Africa; the African soap berry and the Kunde Zulu cowpea; genetic material from the west African cocoa plant. Increasingly, developing countries are going to court over patents on their indigenous plants. India overturned American patents for basmati rice and wound-healing turmeric. Thailand is appealing a patent on jasmine rice. The latest patent to make headlines involves the Hoodia cactus from the Kalahari desert. For centuries, the San people of Southern Africa ate pieces of the cactus to stave off hunger and thirst. Analysing the cactus, the parastatal Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in South Africa found the molecule that curbs appetite and sold the rights to develop an anti-obesity drug to pharmaceutical company Pfizer. It could be worth billions of US dollars. The San complained. Its council threatened a lawsuit. Earlier this year the CSIR agreed to share eventual royalties, and the Hoodia cactus became a landmark case whereby indigenous communities stake a claim on their knowledge and profits derived of it. "Western medicine is protected. Wildlife is protected. But our knowledge isn't, like it's worth nothing," said T.J. Matiba, a Venda traditional healer, founder and president of South Africa's Council of Traditional Healers since 1985. Paradoxically, the poorest people in the world live in the world's biodiversity hot spots. If they derive a benefit from their natural resources and indigenous knowledge, they would be keen to protect them. That approach, however, is in conflict with world trade rules.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity, ratified by 183 countries and in force since 1993, recognises the sovereignty of states and communities over their genetic resources. But the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) does not. Since 1995, WTO requires its member countries to comply with TRIPS. This contradiction creates "schizophrenia between patent legislation and protection of indigenous knowledge," said Rachel Wynberg, a South African researcher on biodiversity now with the University of Strathclyde in the UK. The root problem is that the existing system of intellectual property rights and patents does not accommodate non-western systems of knowledge ownership and access. "It serves the interests of industrialised countries and fails indigenous communities and holders of traditional knowledge," said Tom Suchanandan, of South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council. Under international law, an invention qualifies for patent protection only if it is new and involves an inventive step. This excludes traditional products, developed and handed down over generations. The system is rooted in the European industrial and scientific tradition. It views knowledge as a commodity owned by an individual or a company with the goal of trade. Indigenous knowledge has a trans-generational, communal and cultural nature. "There is no way in which the intellectual property system can protect indigenous knowledge," said Gcaba. "We can't hijack it. We must create a new

system." The first line of defence, said Tewolde, is for developing countries to freeze biopatents, or patents on living things, from seeds to plants to genes.

At the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999, the African group took the lead in opposing the patenting of life and protecting community rights over their agricultural and biological heritage. They are inspired by the African Model Law adopted by the former Organisation of African Unity. It protects the rights of farmers, breeders and local communities to their biological resources, traditional knowledge and technologies. Their collective rights prevail over individual or corporate monopoly interests. The patenting of life in any of its forms violates these rights. Last but not least, the state should ensure that at least half of benefits derived from commercial use of biological resources are channeled back to the local community. African countries must now debate this model law and pass their own. "After centuries of unjust and unfair extraction of our resources that continues today, this is a step towards justice," said Tewolde.

What is Hoodia?

Hoodia Gordonii is a leafless, spiky succulent plant. It grows naturally in the Northern Cape, a province of South Africa, where it is registered as a protected species by Nature Conservation. Hoodia Gordonii is famous for its effects as an appetite suppressant and mood enhancer. EXCELLENT results have been obtained from people using it as part of a weight loss program, leading to many international companies making and selling Hoodia as a 'new miracle diet pill'. Mass global interest has been shown for Hoodia since Pfizer, the international pharmaceutical giant, started to research Hoodia's potential to help people with obesity.

What does it do?

Hoodia Gordonii is a well known appetite suppressant and mood enhancer. Recent research has shown that the Hoodia Gordonii species contains a molecule that is similar to glucose, only MUCH stronger. The scientists believe that this molecule in Hoodia 'fools' the body into believing that it has just eaten. The result of eating Hoodia is thus a complete lack of appetite. Because of this property, Western countries have claimed that Hoodia is the 'new miracle diet ingredient'. There is strong evidence to suggest that Hoodia may become a worldwide answer to obesity, as studies confirmed excellent results.

What will I feel when I take Hoodia?

Hoodia is a wonderful plant to eat. It tastes sweet and bitter. It produces an immediate effect upon eating. Many people experience an uplifting in their mood immediately, followed by a complete forfillment of the appetite. After eating Hoodia Gordonii, one simply doesn't feel like eating a thing. You might want to eat because you know its lunchtime, but there's simply no desire to chew and swallow your food. PLEASE NOTE that people do report different reaction times to Hoodia - this appears to be dose specific. Some individuals may need to take more than others in order to experience the effects.

Are there any side effects or contra-indications?

As far as scientists know, there are no negative side effects. The local SAN, whose ancestors have been using the plant for thousands of years, claim that there are no negative side effects. We do not know for sure whether there may be drugs that interact negatively with Hoodia, since it is a new suppliment. Hoodia is currently not classified as a drug, but as a nutrient, which is testimony to how safe it is.

How do we know about the use of Hoodia?

Shepherds and hunters of the nomadic SAN tribes that populate the arid territories of South Africa and Namibia have used it for thousands of years. Pfizer recently discovered Hoodia and decided to invest millions into researching the plants benefits as a new drug

that would help with obesity. The research published by this company has catapulted Hoodia into the international spotlight.

What about the SAN people? Don't they own the rights to this plant?

The SAN are the owners of the traditional knowledge about the Hoodia plant. At some point the SAN realized that this multinational giant was going to make a handsome profit from the sale of Hoodia and decided to argue their rights to the ownership of the knowledge of its medicinal uses. The case that followed ensured that the SAN received a percentage of profit from all sales of Hoodia.

Hoodia is not a stimulant.
It will not: give you the shakes make your heart race raise your body temperature make you anxious or nervous