



Ric Scalzo in a field of Echinacea at Gaia's organic farm in Brevard, North Carolina.

Serving Mother Earth and Her Children

GAIA HERBS FOUNDER RIC SCALZO SHARES PLANT WISDOM WITH CHILDREN AROUND THE GLOBE

By Zoe Helene

Richard “Ric” Scalzo is founder, president and CEO of Gaia Herbs, making sustainable herbal products and setting industry standards for plant medicine education and advocacy for 25 years. One of North America’s most respected herbalists and botanical researchers, he is an innovator and pioneer in the herbal extracts industry. Now he is sharing that knowledge with children around the world.

What does the name Gaia mean?

It comes from Greek and Sanskrit traditions, and implies Mother Earth. Gaia means all of life on earth being interconnected and in a constant state of abundant interdependence and co-evolution. The core values of the company are based on the holistic principles of naturopathic medicine: Work with the powers of nature. Do no harm to plants, planet, people and animals. Teach and inspire others.

What was Gaia's first offering?

Fine extracts of Ginkgo and Echinacea, sourced from my network of herbalists. I got a grinder and a special press designed

by a machinist, and we launched a new concept: herbal extracts with the full vital force of the fresh plant. Competitors were making tinctures from dry herbs, so this was new.

What is most important to you now?

My thoughts have shifted to how I can give back, and this seems to involve children. I don't know if I've missed my opportunity to have my own kids, but at this point I don't have any. So kids have become an important focal point for me.

Through The Center for Sustainable and Environmental Learning in Costa Rica, we've developed an off-the-grid semester program for high school students from all over the world to learn how to take care of the planet. We bring in leading experts as teachers. I'm on the board of directors for Golden Courage International for girls and boys forced into prostitution at a very young age. It's really emotional for me. The primary objective is to give them a second chance—through courage, hope, safety and education. I'm leading the development of a for-profit organic farming venue to create an opportunity for employment for them after they graduate

by learning to grow high-quality organic medicinal plants. Locally, through our GaiaKids Farm Field Day program, I teach kids about organic farming and the role of bees on the farm, and give them samples of wildflower honey.

Do you have a favorite plant medicine?

Tulsi Basil, native to India. It is powerful, chemically complex, spiritually sublime, and wonderfully fragrant in our fields. I am also particularly interested in saffron. Saffron is wild-collected from China and Tibet, or cultivated in Spain. These are exotic plants, but many important plants, like Echinacea, are native to North America. Gaiaherbs.com

PLANT REVOLUTION

Earth Bottles, Scalzo's new creation, is a 100 percent plant-based compostable plastic alternative that has the thermal stability and tensile strength of plastic. Gaia Herbs will launch a line of bottles for dietary supplements, cosmetics and functional beverages this fall.