



Danny Seo's Wholeearth line will launch on — when else? — Earth Day.

GREEN LIKE ME

DANNY SEO BRINGS HIS HOMESPUN GREEN MOVEMENT TO MARKET WITH ORGANIC PRODUCTS THAT ARE SHAKING UP THE INDUSTRY.

by Patti Verbanas



nvironmental lifestyle expert Danny Seo's birth had some auspicious timing: He was born on Earth Day. Taking the meaning of the day to heart at his 12th birthday party, he challenged his friends to help him "save the planet by the year 2000." By age 18, his movement had evolved into Earth 2000, one of the largest teen-only environmental advocacy groups. The idealism that started Seo, 32, on his path has not wavered, and though he now concedes that he cannot change the world, he knows he *can* challenge perspectives.

Seo's creative energy has turned his Simply Green philosophy into a cultural phenomenon. His partnerships with major retailers and brands, such as JCPenney, Simmons, and Method, have manifested his message into organic products that are inexpensive, accessible, and design-conscious. His partnership criterion is strict: He must be involved in product development, not just serve as a paid spokesperson. For JCPenney, he worked with the company to conceptualize its Simply Green line, which offers organic, recycled, and renewable products. (This spring, Simply Green will unveil a table lamp with LED technology.) Seo's collaboration with Simmons on its Natural Care eco-friendly mattresses began in 2008 after he mail-ordered an organic mattress that was left at his doorstep in the rain; he approached Simmons about creating a line that could be sold at retail locations like other mattresses. And Seo has been a fan of Method's progressive fusion of green technology and design since the products

came to market about a decade ago.

The New Year marks a number of breakthroughs for Seo, who recently began writing a syndicated column called "Do Just One Thing." (Published in New Jersey in *The Record* in Bergen County.) On April 22 — the 40th anniversary of Earth Day — he will launch Wholearth, his line of beauty and skin-care products that heralds a turn in the industry: It offers the first USDA certified organic fragrance and body wash collection that have come to market (wholeearthbeauty.com).

We caught up with Seo at his Bucks County, Pennsylvania, home to talk about this next frontier for organics.

How is your organic beauty and skin-care line revolutionary?

The development was more than just creating a product line; it was about innovating something in the industry. Many of these products, such as the fragrance and body wash, will be the first of their kind marketed with the USDA certified organic label. This mark is the strictest one you can get on a product, because from farm to factory to finished item, it has to be created in USDA-certified facilities. So, even consumers who don't trust a lot of certification programs usually trust this one standard.

What challenges did you encounter in creating a USDA certified organic line?

Most companies put preservatives, stabilizers, and petrochemicals in their products to fill them up and make them cheaper. You can't get away with that in organic products, which are paraben-free; but at the same time, you don't want a body lotion to go bad after you buy it. We had to innovate. I'm Korean-American, and the national dish of Korea is a pickled cabbage dish called kimchi.

The way it's made is by combining cabbage and spices, and pickling it at room temperature for three days. During this pickling process, an enzyme is created that preserves the product. We extracted that enzyme and introduced it into all our products as a natural preservative. So, our products are food-grade and have an 18-month shelf life.

What are the health benefits of using organic beauty and skin care products?

Phthalate is a plasticizer used to dissipate fragrance, but it can disrupt the endocrine system. Our fragrances are phthalate-free formulations; we use real essential oil in an alcohol base instead — an idea we took from the Parisian perfume houses of a century ago. And because we use real, not synthetic, lavender, bergamot, and vanilla extracts, they don't create an obnoxious scent that some people love and some people absolutely hate. They are the real deal and perfect for women who have sensitive skin or are allergic to strong fragrances.

Seo's Quick Tips:

- 1. Buy organic tomatoes. They are one of the most overly sprayed crops. One of the benefits of living in the Garden State is that New Jersey tomatoes are the best you can get.*
- 2. Don't overcharge your electronics. When a rechargeable battery is overcharged, it will no longer take as long a charge and you'll have to replace it sooner. Wear down a battery until it's on its last bar before recharging.*
- 3. Always get a full tank of gas as opposed to putting \$10 in here and there. You'll take fewer trips to the pump, which is more fuel-efficient.*