

GENESIS

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Under the Juice Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Law, all "very" small businesses must comply with the new anti-bacterial requirements by January 2004 unless they sell directly to end users.

"We feel we do (sell directly to customers) because we manage and stock every store shelf," Sepp said. "It's just that we are using popular avenues that include other products."

Until early September, Genesis' staff thought it had several months to find a solution to its problem. But because the company distributes more than 350,000 units of juice per year — ranging from pint to half gallon sizes — and it grossed more than \$500,000 in one year, it's currently too successful to be considered a "very small" business.

"We don't want to operate illegally," Sepp said. "But this kind of sword hanging over our heads has affected the company morale."

Genesis Juice's process involves washing hand-picked fruits and vegetables, pressing them gently to preserve live enzymes and vitamins and bottling and distributing the juice to more than 50 locations in Lane County and Portland.

Although the process currently does not meet government standards, state agencies that enforce the federal law have yet to receive standard guidelines, Sepp said.

The company's reasons for remaining raw stem from the goal to get the most out of the processed fruit. Sepp said the cheapest and most common process required by the FDA is "flash pasteurization," which involves briefly flowing the juice over a heated surface to kill viruses like E. coli. Despite the short interval of 160-degree heat exposure, the process kills all natural enzymes and many nu-

trients inherent in the fruit.

Sepp said the new legislation, which resulted in 2001, stemmed from an E. coli outbreak in 1996 when some children and senior citizens fell ill after drinking contaminated Odwalla fruit juices.

Odwalla had used "windfallen" apples that fell on cow manure-covered fields and inadvertently spread the bacteria because it didn't pasteurize its juices at the time, Sepp said.

"That was the straw that broke the camel's back," Sepp said. "We had a few copy-cat situations reported, but we tested each inquiry and got nothing, which means it wasn't our juice that made those people ill."

George Brown — owner of Kiva, a health-food store and Genesis Juice distributor located at 125 W. 11th Ave. — said the closure of Genesis would create more business for Odwalla and mark a sad day for independent juice companies.

"Basically, if it happens, Genesis will be gone, and Odwalla will rule because it's owned by a huge company like Coca-Cola," he said. "And that would be tragic because (Genesis) is kind of an institution in Eugene."

Owned by its employees, Genesis Juice is one of only a handful of co-ops that remain since a statewide co-op boom more than two decades ago, Sepp said.

"We could probably take out a loan and buy basic pasteurizing equipment, but we've always been about fresh, raw juice," she said.

Kathee Lavine, owner of Holy Cow Vegetarian Foods, located at 2260 Augusta St., said Genesis Juice sets a great example of success for struggling co-ops in Oregon.

"Genesis is the only raw juice company that packages in glass for recycling purposes and operates as one of the last co-ops in the state," she said. "They really are unique in more ways than one."

Lavine said the FDA's legislation guide-

lines seem unnecessary when it comes to Genesis Juice's healthy reputation.

"(The FDA) is using a mallet when they should be using a fine tooth comb," she said. "If they shut down Genesis, it would be a tragic loss."

Despite concern among retailers,

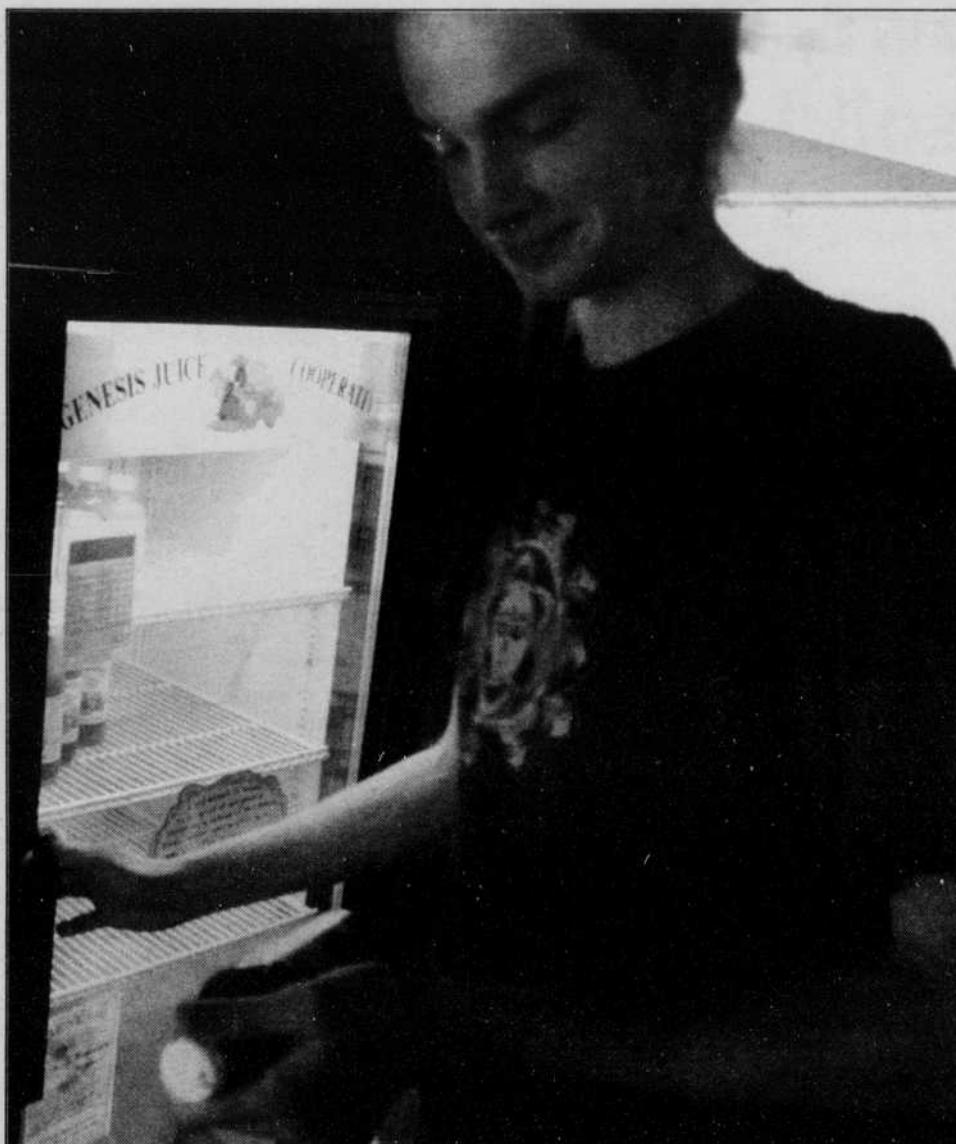
Sepp said she is optimistic because the company is working with a lawyer to find a more direct way to sell to customers and to solidify its stance for federal review next year.

"We need to find some common ground on the regulation, and I think

we will," she said.

For locations of Genesis Juice distributors in Eugene, visit www.efn.org/~genesis/.

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at caronalarab@dailyemerald.com.



Senior Andrew McLaughlin grabs a Genesis Juice at the Holy Cow Café before class on Friday.

Lauren Wimer
Photographer

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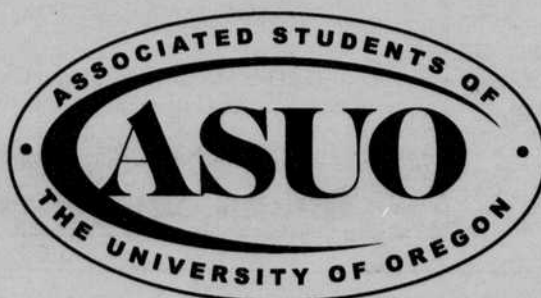
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