

Herbs – a bright future of Poland...

History of the Polish Herbal Committee

Summary



he book shows the history of the Polish Herbal Committee (PKZ), a social organization established in 1930 and reactivated in 1993 for revival and modernization of herbal production and promotion of phytotherapy in Poland.

Almost 80-years-long history of PKZ has been presented with wide historical background revealing polish tradition of herbal medicine and industry as well as political events and social transformation processes in Poland. The book consists of ten chapters and four supplements and has been extensively documented.

The first chapter called “Health gardens and medicine cabinets” describes the Polish habit to keep herbal medicine cabinets for personal use and botanical medical books published in the 16th and 17th centuries in Polish language. This chapter also presents short biographies of people engaged in establishing herbal plantations and herbs collection from natural resources in Austrian and Russian annex territories before obtaining Poland’s independence in 1918.

The second chapter – “Return to herbs” explains what the prototype, the circumstances of establishing the organization, the organizational structure, the financing sources and the activity range of PKZ have been like. The most important activities of PKZ have been: patronage over investigation of medicinal herbs used in Polish folk medicine, establishing collective plantations in smallholder farms, implementation of standardization of medicinal plants. The greatest success of PKZ has been achieving export predominance over import in Poland’s international herbs trade.

The war period in Polish herbal industry has been described in the next chapter that shows the damage of the entire PKZ achievements by the German occupier. The herbal action for people displaced from so called Land of Warthe to so called General Province has been described, organized by the Polish Humanitarian Organization with Germans' consent.

The fourth chapter "Centrally controlled herbal industry (1945-1956)" has been focused on trials to establish a government independent organization by people engaged in development of herbal industry before World War II. Further it has been demonstrated how this organization has been politicized and replaced by another one, strictly subordinated to the government and incorporated into the central controlled economy system.

"Hopes and disappointments (1957-1962)" is the title of the fifth chapter which explains what impact on herbal industry had the short-lasting political renewal initiated with the Poznan 1956 uprising. In that period of time the greatest herbal corporation in Eastern Europe, the "Herbapol" Union, has been established.

Politicization and mistakes in herbal manufacture, especially in drying and purchase, have been presented in the sixth chapter called "Herbs – an irreplaceable good (1963 – August 1980)". This chapter also describes the phenomenon of the "Herbapol" Union as a herbal corporation of different activities, among them seed science, promotion of modern agrotechnics, cultivation of new medicinal plant species and production of herbal medicines. The milieu of herb growers and herb pickers has been characterized and the measures to protect natural resources of medicinal plants against excessive picking have been described.

The establishment of the Independent and Self-Governing Solidarity Trade Union in August 1980 initiated a general, herbal industry included, renewal of social life in Poland.

The next chapter "Towards the renewal of herbal industry (August 1980 – August 1991)" has been devoted to social initiatives taken to regain full independence from government by the organization of herb growers and pickers. In those years Poland had been struck by a strong economic crisis that revealed the weaknesses of central economy planning and control. The economic crisis has also touched the herbal industry which in many growers and pickers opinion has no longer been profitable. The purchase decrease of herbal raw material contributed to a crisis in the "Herbapol" Union which has been wound up.

In June 1991 efforts to reactivate PKZ started and succeeded in 1993. The revival of PKZ has been discussed in chapter seventh called "Phytotherapy as a field of alternative medicine (June 1991 – March 1997)". In the first years after reactivation PKZ as an organization of herb growers, pickers and manufacturers of herbal products and medicines had to face many difficulties resulting from unfavorable



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registration rules and sales restrictions. At that time Poland has been progressively implementing the Commission E and ESCOP standards.

Further transformation of the Polish herbal industry has been described in chapter ninth “Phytotherapy as section of scientific medicine (March 1997-2009)”. The forecast of Poland’s access to the European Union accelerated modernization of Polish herbal industry. PKZ has been engaged in that modernization process as co-organizer of herbal conferences and workshops, indicating the development tendencies of herbal production and the perspectives of herbal medicines in Poland and abroad. In last years PKZ played the promoter role of a modern herbal industry complying with EU standards and a rational evidence-based- phytotherapy.

The closing part of the book essential demonstrates the most characteristic features of the Polish herbal industry of the 20th century and the meaning of the social organization of herb growers and pickers, including manufacturers of herbal medicines in the years 1930-1939 and from 1993.

The present Board of PKZ has been presented in the first annex. The following three annexes contain biographies of notable people who have contributed to the Polish herbal industry of the 20th century; a list of wholesalers and herbal companies cooperating with PKZ in the years 1930-1939; a list of member companies of PKZ reactivated in 1993.