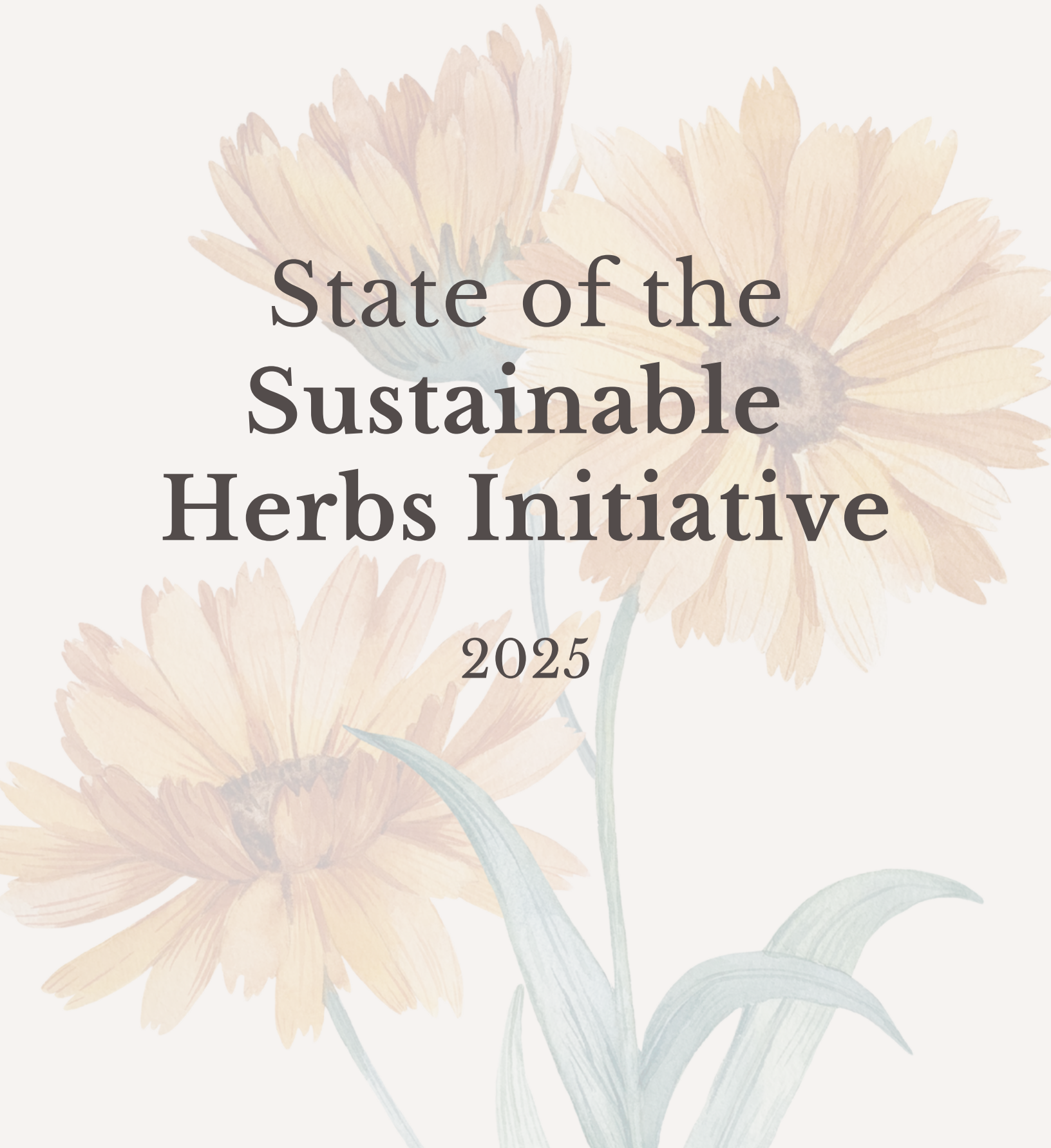


Sustainable  
HERBS INITIATIVE



# State of the Sustainable Herbs Initiative

2025



## SHI's Objective

Quality starts at the source. The attention given to sourcing, processing, and supplier relationships determines whether herbal products companies can deliver the botanicals with the quality needed and whether they'll have reliable access to these botanicals in the future.

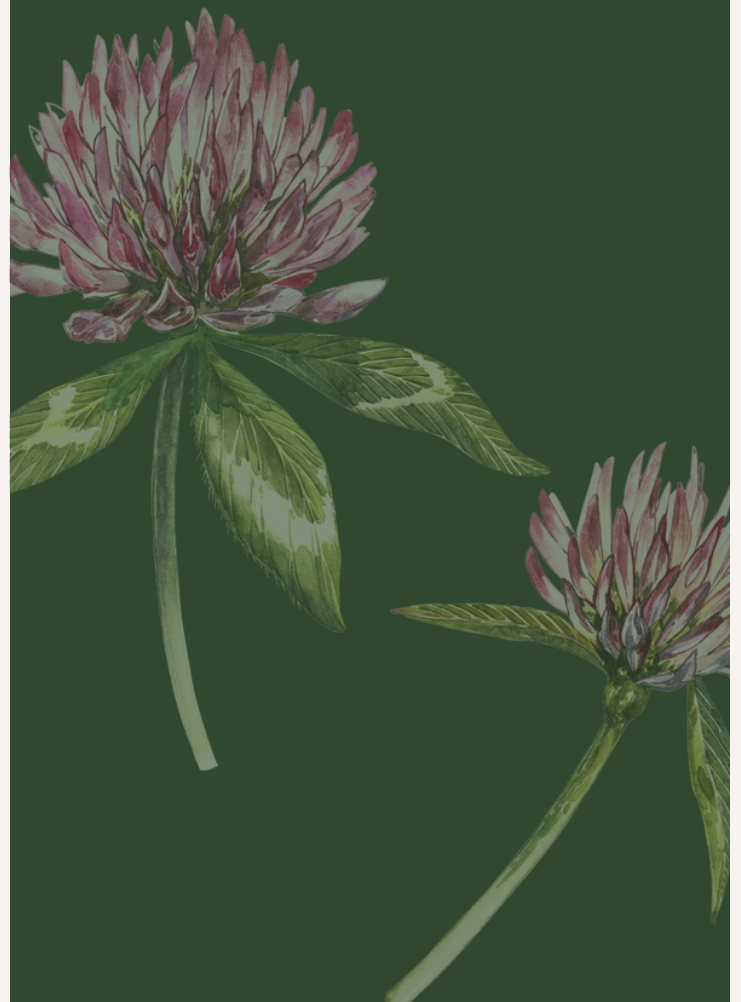
But knowing it and acting on it are different things. In 2025, fungal infections devastated Nigeria's ginger harvest. Organic-certified herbs are increasingly failing pesticide testing. Erratic rainfall and drought disrupted harvests for farmers in India. These aren't abstract threats—they're current disruptions affecting costs, quality, and the ability to fulfill orders.

No company can solve these problems alone. And no company wants to admit what's failing to their competitors. The Sustainable Herbs Initiative exists to create the trusted space where open and honest conversations can happen. At monthly meetings, participants share the challenges in meeting their goals and how they've navigated supplier crises. Best practices get tested against real experience, not just presented in white papers.

This report shows what those conversations produced in 2025 and where we're headed in 2026. Our work is about creating the relationships and shared knowledge that make sustainable sourcing possible.

## SHI Asks:

What does it take to truly honor people, plants, and place—from source to finished product? While technical solutions like certifications and contracts are part of the answer, SHI programs cultivate the "inner capacities" needed to do this work: slowing down, listening to stakeholders and to ourselves, showing up as whole people. These practices help participants connect more deeply to the work we are collectively doing. This builds the genuine connections and trust from which sustainable business practices and industry innovations organically emerge.



---

## Our Members

SHI is currently supported by fifty-five member herbal product and dietary supplement companies, with outreach to additional potential supporters ongoing. Members join to be part of a values-driven community committed to better supporting the plants, people, and planet. They stay involved for the professional development, peer support, and pre-competitive collaboration, and because it's good for their business.

***“SHI has become an integral part of Synergy’s business worldview. It is now commonplace for our employees to reference an idea, training, case study, or collaborative working group when making decisions that impact our suppliers, internal operations, or consumers. Inevitably, we make more holistic and responsible decisions as a result. If that doesn’t prove the business case for SHI, I don’t know what does.”***

***— Zacharia Levine, Head of Organizational Stewardship, The Synergy Company***

### SHI Members include

Afrigetics Botanicals

American College of Healthcare Sciences

Amy Timmons Malek

Applied Food Sciences

Asheville Tea Company

Banyan Botanicals

Blue Sky Botanicals

Boswellness

Crisha Ari

Doselva

Ecoso Dynamics

ES Botanicals

Eurofins

Euromed

evanhealy

Fair Source Botanicals

Fat and the Farm

Gaia Herbs

Genevieve Olive

Harmonic Arts

Health Perspectives

Herb Artizan

Herb Pharm

Herbs, etc.

Indena

L'Herbier du Diois

MegaFood

Modern Harvest Farms

Motherlove

Mountain Rose Herbs

Nahar Herbalism

Native Botanicals

Nature's Sunshine Products

NaturPro Scientific

New Chapter

NOW Health Group

Nuherbs

Organic Herb Trading

Oshala Farm

Pacific Botanicals

Pebani

Phytopharm

Rasa

Rebecca's Herbal Apothecary

Retail Alliance

Sarjesa

Silvan Ingredient Ecosystem

St Francis Herb Farm

The Synergy Company

Traditional Medicinals

Verdure Sciences

WishGarden Herbs

Woodland Essence

Yogi

Young Mountain Tea

### SHI Supporters include

Greg Cumberland

Sara Katz

Ted and Calvert Armbrecht

Steven King



## How It Works

SHI creates change through four core programs:

**Monthly Gatherings** Virtual meetings for peer exchange on topics ranging from regenerative finance to equitable sourcing practices. 12 meetings in 2025, 30-45 participants per meeting.

**Learning Labs** Focused virtual series provide the foundation for the collaborative work that is the heart of SHI. We explore how to bring the values at the heart of herbal medicine—reciprocity, respect for the aliveness of plants, relationship—into the work of sourcing and producing products made with these plants. In 2025: General Lab (55 participants), Leadership Lab for CEOs/founders (16 participants), and Alumni Lab on Ecosystem Leadership (35 participants).

**Learning Journeys** Place-based gatherings where industry leaders engage directly with landscapes, communities, and ecosystems affected by sourcing decisions. On previous learning journeys to Appalachia, Oregon, and Nicaragua, we listened to those not often heard in sourcing botanicals and mapped the challenges to implementing sustainable and ethical practices. In 2025, 37 members gathered in Oregon for the fourth in-person SHI gathering. We discussed what makes it difficult to meaningfully address these challenges, created 'safe' fail project ideas to take action, and shared commitments to address these deeper structural problems.

**Working Groups** Monthly collaborative spaces where members tackle specific challenges and produce practical solutions and tools. Each group meets for one hour with 5-25 participants. Topics emerge from Learning Labs and Learning Journeys, focusing on identified leverage points for industry change.

---

## 2025 Contributions

### SHI membership creates real business

**value** through strengthened relationships, shared knowledge, and collaborative problem-solving.

### New Sourcing Partnerships

Companies in the network are forming deeper sourcing relationships with producers: the Synergy Company with Pebani in Peru, evanhealy with Oshala Farm, Organic Herb Trading and l'Herbier du Diois, and numerous others.

### Collaborative Problem-Solving

A few examples include:

- When Hurricane Helene washed away Asheville Tea Company's manufacturing facility, founder Jessie Dean reached out to Alexandra Sangster of Sarjesa Tea, whom she met on an SHI Journey. Sarjesa began manufacturing the tea for Asheville while the company recovers.
- The Scope 3 Working Group collaboratively addresses the challenge of mapping scope 3 emissions for botanicals.

### Shared Knowledge

Every working group involves exchanging best practices: from recommendations for drying and processing equipment to developing supplier visit protocols and templates for risk management, to discussing quality control in wild harvesting communities and responses to pesticide hits on testing. Discussions in working groups are co-created conversations about issues and topics that are most relevant to SHI members.



*SHI Members Harvesting Chamomile*

---

***"The working groups at SHI are invaluable. They go beyond traditional working groups because they are co-created by members themselves, creating dynamic, participatory spaces where we come together to tackle some of the herbal products industry's most pressing challenges and explore new ways of working for meaningful impact. For me, they've become an ongoing source of learning and professional growth, offering thoughtful peer exchange, practical insights, and perspectives. As an active participant, I've gained insights that have saved me both time and money, and, just as importantly, inspired new ways of thinking and renewed excitement for taking on complex challenges."***

**—Erin Smith, Principal, ES Botanicals**

---

## 2025 Contributions



Collecting Linden flowers at l'Herbier du Diois Farm



SHI Director Ann Ambrecht

### **Increased Confidence**

Members speak of how peer exchange with colleagues from other companies strengthens their confidence to advocate for needed changes within their own organizations and in the wider industry.

### **Thought Leadership**

In 2025, SHI Director Ann Ambrecht spoke at Expo West, Supply Side Global, co-organized the GA Workshop on Quality and Sustainability in Naples, Italy, co-facilitated company Learning Journeys, and was a guest speaker in herb schools and at industry online events.

---

***“Working in R&D, SHI has helped me articulate how supplier-aware formulation can actually be executed, product by product. I’ve also learned about new tools that take sustainability from the theoretical “nice to have” to the real world of quality, costs, forecasts, and benchmarks. In short, SHI provides inspiration, resources, and a thoughtful forum to discuss real, effective implementation.”***

**— Guido Mase, Principle Scientist, Chief Formulator, Herbal Educator, Traditional Medicinals**

# Working Groups (2025)

## Quality & Sustainability

This working group was created on the Nicaragua Learning Journey when participants talked about the importance of sharing different stakeholder perspectives on quality. We did this through a series of presentation by SHI members at monthly meetings. The group also identified an interest in researching the links between environmental conditions and botanical quality as a way to build a business case for sustainable investments. A series of guest speakers from the GA workshop on Quality and Sustainability presented on their research to this working group.

## Wild Plants

Working group members identified that a key challenge is educating buyers about the investments required to support wild harvesters and ensure plants are not overharvested. This working group decided to produce a series of buyer's guides documenting what questions to ask and what to look for in purchasing wild harvested species. SHI Director presented on ERB funded research with wild harvesters in Appalachia (part of the work of this working group) at the AHPA Botanical Congress.

## Scope 3 Emissions

Completed first phase of building a primary data emissions database for botanicals; completed Phase I research on 17 botanicals with German firm Sustainable as the foundation for Phase 2. A case study of the lessons learned from this collaboration, both from mapping emissions and from pre-competitive collaboration, will be published in *HerbalGram* in 2026.



*Walking through turmeric and coffee fields, Nicaragua*



*In conversation with local stakeholders, Nicaragua*

## Working Groups (2025)



*SHI members in the field*

*"SHI has inspired me to bring more of my heart to my work each day. It reminds me of my why, why I love working in the herbal supplement space and reminds me that the work we're all doing is so important. It acts as an inspiration and north star for what every industry should and could be."*

—Sara Steinback, Director of Sales and Marketing, Herbs, Etc.

### **Mapping Sourcing Risks**

At many companies, one or two people are often responsible for sourcing 30-100 species globally. In this working group, members share best practices for tracking risk, managing complex supply chains, conducting supplier visits, and more. Insights from these discussions inform the Toolkit 3.0 to be published in 2026.

### **Primary Processors**

This working group offers a safe space for processors to discuss challenges without brand representatives present. Money and pricing emerged as a key topic and so we had a series of presentations on the visible and invisible costs that go into producing botanical material. These discussions led to an SHI monthly meeting on this topic, where stakeholders from source to shelf shared their visible and invisible costs. Discussions in this working group will provide the foundation for the SHI Primary Processing Learning Lab offered in March 2026.

### **Storytelling**

The newest working group, in 2025, members produced the "We are the Sustainable Herbs Initiative" video, based on a poem that was jointly written during a working group meeting. They designed the SHI member badge and organized a Holiday Bundle to raise funds for SHI. Monthly meetings focus on sharing ideas and ways to best spread the message of SHI.

---

# SHI Goals in 2026

**Our goals in 2026 build and expand on the foundation created through our ongoing work to date.**

## I. Community & Relationships

Tending the values at the heart of SHI through monthly meetings, Learning Labs for new and existing SHI members, and in-person gatherings.

- Host 2026 Learning Lab, 45 participants registered.
- Facilitate two Learning Journeys, France (April, 22 participants) and Appalachia (September, 35 participants), and a Wilderness Immersion for eight participants in the southern California desert.
- Continue monthly gatherings focused on relationship-building and values alignment, and peer to peer support.

## 2. Ethical Sourcing and Best Practices

Equipping companies with practical resources and guidance for sustainable sourcing. In 2026, we will develop and share the following resources and opportunities for engagement.

- **SHI Toolkit 3.0** Building on the Sustainability and Regenerative Practices Toolkit 2.0, the SHI Toolkit 3.0 provides best practices and templates for bringing equity and transparency into sourcing practices. The toolkit is based on the expertise of SHI members shared in working groups and monthly meetings.
- **Primary Processor Lab** Build relationships among processors from different regions and empower participants with concrete tools for more equitable sourcing.
- **Wild Plant Buyer's Guides** Produce ten guides for wild-harvested species to provide stakeholders and buyers with a deeper understanding of the factors behind the sustainable and ethical sourcing of particular wild species.
- **Beyond Certification** The value and the challenges of certifications is a recurring theme for all SHI working groups, especially Mapping Sourcing Risks, Quality, and Primary Processing. In 2026, we will host a series on certifications. This will begin with a series of discussions with guest speakers from auditors and certifiers to explore their perspectives on certifications, what's working, what isn't, how they are addressing those shortcomings, and their recommendations for action. SHI members will then decide as a group how to move forward.
- **Phase 2/Scope 3 Working Group | Phase 2** Four companies from Phase 1 and four new companies will continue collaborating to expand the emissions database and identify climate mitigation actions.
- **Ongoing Collaborative Action** Facilitate member collaboration addressing challenges identified in Learning Journeys.

---

# SHI Goals in 2026

## 3. Evidence & Research

Providing the evidence companies need to make the business case for sustainable sourcing investments.

- **Climate & Quality Research** Building on a series of guest speakers to the Quality Working Group on quality and sustainability, we will continue the conversation about how climate change and biodiversity loss affect botanical quality through articles and ongoing collaboration with researchers.
- **ROI Case Studies** Document 3-5 member-led initiatives showing what happens when companies apply sustainable sourcing practices in active supply chains. We're not looking for best-case scenarios. We're examining honest accounts of:
  - What it takes and what it costs.
  - Where practices break down and what makes the difference between failure and success.
  - Trade-offs between quality homogeneity and place-based support, between scale and impact.
  - How peer exchange supports continuous improvement.

Insights from these case studies will inform SHI programming, member meetings, and shared learning.

## 4. Industry Influence

Bringing SHI's work to larger audiences within the herbal products industry and to consumers.

- **Buyer's Guide to Herbal Products** Jointly published with the Institute of Natural Medicine, launching March 2026.
- **Speaking & Outreach** SHI Director to continue to present SHI insights and learnings at industry conferences, bring Learning Journeys to SHI member companies, and speak on sustainability and the herb industry at herb schools and conferences.
- **Consumer Education** Translate member practices and research into accessible guidance for end consumers.



---

## Member Benefits

- Participate in working groups, monthly meetings, and Learning Labs
- Access member-only resources, including recordings, case studies, and research
- Connect with a network of aligned companies for sourcing advice, collaboration, and supplier recommendations
- Typical participation: monthly gathering (1 hour) plus one working group (1 hour). Many members participate in multiple groups.
- Company-wide access: Multiple team members can join different working groups



## Organization Size

SHI is a small organization with one full-time employee (Founder and Director, **Ann Armbrecht**). Additional staff include **Julie Arts**, Co-facilitator; **Terrence Youk**, Media Director; and **Keshari Das**, Program Assistant.

## What We Are Not

SHI is not a certification program, marketing label, or lobbying organization. We don't provide technical services like supply chain audits or laboratory testing. Instead, we create the relationships and knowledge-sharing infrastructure that enables companies to strengthen their own practices.

---

## JOIN US

**If your company is committed to sustainable sourcing and wants to be part of collective solutions to industry challenges, we invite you to explore SHI membership and add SHI to philanthropic considerations. Membership is annual, based on company size.**

**Contact Ann Armbrecht to schedule a conversation about how SHI can support your company's goals.**



# Sustainable

HERBS INITIATIVE



## CONTACT US

[ann@herbsinitiative.org](mailto:ann@herbsinitiative.org)

[www.sustainableherbsinitiative.org](http://www.sustainableherbsinitiative.org)