

## The Latest Superfood? Peru's Maca Root

By Kris Maher and Robert Kozak, *The Wall Street Journal*

*In Peru, there's a frenzy caused by maca demand. Prices Leap as Buyers From China Swoop In, Looking for Burst of Energy.*

In Peru, prices of maca, a small turnip-like root, are soaring as buyers from China swoop in to buy a product believed to provide a burst of energy, especially as a sort of natural Viagra.

**“The price of maca may have crossed a line. The extract market could collapse,” said Chris Kilham, a consultant with Naturex, a French health and nutritional ingredients provider.**

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CARHUAMAYO, Peru—Natural-products companies based in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere have steadily built a market for maca, a small turnip-like root that grows in high mountain areas, and that is believed to give a burst of energy, especially as a sort of natural Viagra.

This year a flood of buyers from China swooped into the Junin region of central Peru to buy up as much of the root as possible. That led to a tenfold increase in the price of maca, and in some cases even more, growers say.

Peruvian exporters say the frenzy to find maca has led to broken long-term supply contracts. Global natural-products companies say they are in danger of being pushed out of the market. Police say the aggressive demand has led to sometimes violent thefts of sacks of maca in Peru.

Sales of semiprocessed maca, dried and ground up on small farms and processing plants in the area, have boomed. The government of Peru has sounded the alarm bell that raw maca is also being smuggled out. Officials say the Peruvian maca is used to improve lesser-quality maca grown in China.

Peruvian regulations prohibit the export of unprocessed maca. Peru's tax agency confirms it seized tons of unprocessed maca before it was smuggled out this year. Some of that was being sent to Asia alongside other prohibited products like sea horses and shark fins, officials said.