



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

And so it begins again

Recent history tells us that this is the time of year that we have to gird our loins and prepare not just for the longer darker nights, but also for the increased activity on the technical, regulatory and political fronts that the winter brings.

I'm sorry to point this sad fact out but it's official; summer is now over, and that means that the rest of Europe has come back to life after its traditional summer shutdown, and this is never more the case than in Brussels.

Issues relating to health claims, the addition of nutrients, nutrient profiling, botanicals, novel foods, PARNUTS, the provision of food information to consumers and much more are all bubbling away and will require our close attention over the coming months. Some or all of these issues will unquestionably impact most of our member companies and many throughout this industry.

And over this same period our

members will be coming to terms with the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation, managing the end of the transition period. It is important to remember that this legislation has nothing to do with product or consumer safety, it is simply a question of product labelling. In effect, the deadline represents the end of an absurdly short transition period, which only allowed food manufacturers six months to remove all non-authorized claims from the UK/EU market. The six-month transition period for this legislation is particularly unfair because it disproportionately impacts an industry sector that has the majority of products legitimately carrying two to three years of shelf-life.

In spite of this, the industry is doing everything it can to comply with the requirements of this legislation, which impact every form of consumer communication from labelling to promotional material, advertising, leaflets and websites.

We have been advising all of our members to have a plan for change and to be consulting with their own enforcement authorities and we recently held a very instructive and informative member workshop on this issue. It goes without saying that companies are incurring huge costs in trying to meet the requirements of this legislation, whilst we are in the middle of the most difficult economic environment for decades.

The sad fact is that the regulation is banning many hundreds of claims on products that have been well-understood and accepted by the average consumer for decades – such as 'dietary fibre helps maintain a healthy digestive system' and 'glucosamine helps maintain healthy joints'. As a result the legislation is, unfortunately, counterproductive as it denies consumers the very information that they increasingly want about how and why these products might be used, and what reasonable expectations they might have for their effectiveness.

And if the intention of this regulation was to have health claims that are scientifically substantiated and 'easily understood' by the average consumer, where is the sense in one of the few approved claims being 'Pantothenic Acid contributes to the normal synthesis and metabolism of steroid hormones, vitamin D and some neurotransmitters'!

The key issue of the coming months, and probably the entire year ahead of us, is the future for botanicals and in particular the more than 2,000 botanical health claims currently 'on-hold' whilst the Commission tries to figure out how they can be assessed by EFSA without

taking into account evidence of traditional use, when a concurrent piece of legislation, the Traditional Herbal and Medicinal Products Directive, finds it quite acceptable to accept such evidence as part of an application for a THR license.

The global market for botanicals – the word commonly used for herbal ingredients used in plant food supplements – is estimated to reach £251 billion by 2017, and botanical food supplements make up 40 per cent of the food supplement market worldwide. In Europe, the botanicals market is both well-developed and buoyant, but it faces regulatory challenges. All of which makes our next event, the HFMA's 'The Future for Botanicals' conference at the end of October, a timely and topical one that will not only clarify some of the complex areas surrounding botanical health claims, but also provide practical advice from industry experts for attendees to take away, with speakers from the United States, France, Belgium, Italy and here in the UK.

In November, we will kick-start our UK political lobbying campaign with our annual Parliamentary briefing breakfast, and we will take the opportunity to brief a group of Parliamentarians on our issues and concerns. The recent Government reshuffle was, in theory, a positive one for our industry and we are now actively seeking a meeting with Anna Soubry MP, who has replaced Anne Milton MP as the new Public Health Minister. More on this in due course. **hfb**

If you want to know more, or would like to join the HFMA or learn more about our activities, please contact me at graham@hfma.co.uk.



HFMA membership is vital to ensure that your company keeps abreast of the fast-changing regulatory environment. The HFMA is the UK's best source of information and most effective defender of our industry's interests. To help the HFMA defend your business at this most critical time contact hfma@hfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

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The Voice of the Natural Health Industry