



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

A season ticket on Eurostar



Following on from a very lively and vibrant Olympia show in April, in May it was the turn of the Vitafoods show in Geneva. And very impressive it was too, with the UK industry extremely well represented, and very heartening for me to continually bump into our member companies either exhibiting or walking the show, all very positive indeed about the activities of the HFMA in representing their best interests.

The show also presented the opportunity for me to get together with my counterparts from the other principle industry trade associations from across Europe, most of whom are, like the HFMA, also members of the European pan-industry federation EHPM. And how great it is to see that following its recent restructuring we have a newly-independent and self-governing EHPM, managed by a strong new Director General, Patrick Ahern, and located in its own offices close to the European Parliament in Brussels.

I know that Patrick is well and truly on the case, backed by an active new board and driven by energetic new working groups (HFMA representatives sit on all of these, and I am on the Communications group), all of which have now met for the first time. The HFMA was an original signatory to the document that created the EHPM over 38 years ago, and we remain totally committed to its future health and wellbeing.

As part of our strong new Parliamentary outreach campaign, I have already travelled to Brussels four times this year, with a further three trips planned in the next six weeks. Aside from a very positive meeting with our most proactive and supportive UK MEP, Julie Girling, and a number of interesting meetings with UKIP MEPs – UKIP is gaining a voice on the back of the UK's 'In/Out' debate – I have for the first time met with MEPs from other member

states, such as Italy and Germany.

And therein lies an interesting challenge, when arguments of UK national interest are, for obvious reasons, less-than-compelling, and alternative points have to be made on EU-wide industry impact, and the devastating effect of a stream of new regulations on small and medium-sized businesses.

At the end of June EHPM has organised a European Parliament workshop on the subject of botanicals, under the title of 'Botanicals: Embracing Tradition & SMEs', and hosted by Belgian Socialist MEP, Marc Tarabella. This is a workshop for MEPs and their staff, held within the European Parliament, the aim of which is to have them better understand our issues and concerns relating to the legislation of botanicals. Whilst it is not generally open to external attendees, EHPM member association officers/representatives will be able to attend, and HFMA Vice-President Penny Viner and I will represent Herbal Forum and the HFMA's interests and we will obviously report back on the event to HFMA members on the outcomes.

We are continuing with our lobbying activities in Westminster, of course, but it is increasingly

difficult to see how our UK politicians can impact events in Brussels, apart from the vital role of making sure that Government ministers are representing the legitimate concerns of UK businesses to their counterparts in the Commission. So we must keep the pressure on in Westminster, whilst we step up our activities in Brussels. As I write this, tomorrow morning I will be in Westminster once again meeting with an MP, and I have a number of similar meetings lined up over the coming weeks. All of which will build up nicely to our next formal parliamentary event in September, where we hope that a good number of representatives from both the Lords and Commons will be present to hear an update on our issues and concerns.

In the meantime the varied and important work of the HFMA goes on. Two very important current projects relate to two substances, which are very important to our industry here in the UK – folic acid and glucosamine. On the positive side, the HFMA has worked very closely with other UK associations and the spina bifida charity SHINE to produce a formal Article 14 disease risk reduction health claim dossier for folic acid and its role in the reduced incidence of neural

tube defects in the unborn child. An extremely comprehensive dossier has been compiled by the HFMA's Scientific Adviser, Dr Michele Sadler, and this has now been submitted to the European Food Safety Authority for assessment under the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. If successful, the entire EU-wide industry will benefit from this great example of cross-industry cooperation.

On the more negative side, we are anticipating a serious challenge to the unlicensed food supplement status of glucosamine from one of the existing EU medicinal licence holders for glucosamine. This has been an intermittent concern for some years now and we are working closely with the MHRA to try to head off this challenge. But it is a challenge we must take very seriously, and is a good example of how we must remain vigilant and be prepared to rise to these challenges.

And then there is the ever-present risk of those PR 'scuds' that continue to blight our industry. A big part of my day today has been spent on planning how we might respond to the latest of these over the weekend, in *The Guardian's* *Weekend* supplement, under the headline 'Vitamins: stop taking the pills'!

In closing, I ought to mention that after three years as Chair of the HFMA, Martin Last has handed over the reins to Lynn Lord, of Natures Aid, who will I'm sure be ably assisted by our new Vice-Chair, Robert Taylor, of Vitabiotics. I am certain that Lynn will do as good a job as Martin has, and continue to present the HFMA in the best possible light. What we know for sure is that the vital work of the HFMA is as important today as it has ever been. **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