



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

50 years young

A couple of weeks have now passed since we all gathered in Docklands for our annual Natural & Organic Products Expo, and a good time appeared to have been had by all. All of those quite understandable reservations about whether our annual trade show would survive and prosper after leaving its 'home' at Olympia turned out to be unfounded, and this ExCeL show was, by common consensus, regarded to be a great success by attendees and exhibitors alike.

I was not one of those who feared for the 'new' show, rather I championed the change and encouraged the organisers to proceed with confidence. The current ExCeL Arena, and all of the facilities and logistics surrounding it, is light years on from that which the first shows took place in around 15 years ago.

The HFMA held its Annual Meeting of members during the show, and it was a well-attended and very upbeat meeting, featuring a speech by HFMA Chair, Robert Taylor, and presentations by Treasurer Tom Moses (in his 13th year in the role!) and myself. In addition, the Maurice Hanssen Award of Honour was awarded to Dr Kartar Lalvani, founder of Vitabiotics, a very worthy winner indeed. Kartar, who is now well into his 80s, has worked in the industry for over 45 years, during which time he has helped to lead the UK vitamin and supplement market from the front. Needless to say, there was a strong '50th anniversary' feel to the occasion, never more so than at the close of the meeting when the show organisers appeared with a surprise celebration birthday cake.

A couple of days after the show was over we held our roundtable of noted academics, chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Government's Scientific



Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), Professor Peter Aggett. As a key part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, the roundtable discussed 'Micronutrient initiatives for future health', and the output document from this roundtable will feature heavily in our positive 50th-related communications as the year progresses.

The following week, I made yet another trip to Brussels, this time to meet with senior Commission officials, including Basil Mathioudakis' replacement following his recent retirement, who are relatively new to their roles as part of the incoming Juncker Commission, and therefore not aware of the HFMA's issues and concerns. Our overarching aims for these meetings were to show:

- That the HFMA is perceived as a serious and credible organisation, and part of an equally serious and credible EU-wide federation.
- That we are not against appropriate new legislation per se, but that we have legitimate concerns about inappropriate implementation and enforcement of new legislation.
- That the concept of harmonisation of human nutrition is fundamentally flawed if it does not acknowledge and recognise

the widely varying environmental, lifestyle and nutritional needs across the member states.

■ That the flair and innovation in this sector is driven predominantly by SME companies, and it is these very organisations that are being hardest hit by recent legislative changes.

■ That consumer choice and access to the information they need is being dramatically restricted by recent regulatory changes.

I can happily report that these messages were clearly received, and that our objectives were achieved. There is a wind of change in Brussels right now as the new Commission seeks to follow a better-regulation agenda and to be more consultative with stakeholders, more often and earlier in the regulation-creation process. And ultimately, it is committed to taking action to protect Small and Medium-sized business (SMEs) that have suffered particularly in the face of an onslaught of new legislation.

Across Europe, our industry, and the HFMA's members (75 per cent of which are SMEs), is driven by the passion, enterprise and innovation of small businesses, and we are not dissimilar to other sectors in that respect. The Commission appears

to have finally figured out that SMEs have become fundamentally disillusioned with their lot, and seem to be intent on rectifying this situation. We have to hope that this is not pandering and that the Commission resolutely sticks to the plan, and you can be assured that the HFMA will be doing all within its powers to make sure this happens.

A classic example of ill-conceived, regulation for regulation's sake 'red tape' is the latest problem we are trying to resolve – that of which food additives are permitted for use in the production of food supplements, particularly those that are liquids or syrups for consumption by infants and young children. If the Commission has its way, certain products that form part of UK health policy recommendations, for example certain 'Healthy Start' products, will no longer be able to be manufactured! So, we will soon see just how serious the Commission is about plans for a more sensible and considered approach.

In closing, I will mention that I just returned from the annual Vitafoods show in Geneva, unquestionably the best show of its kind in Europe. I was able to meet with many existing and prospective HFMA member companies, and have several meetings with my counterparts from other EU national trade associations. The positive vibe throughout the show floor felt like a fair reflection of the equally buoyant sense I took away from the ExCeL show. Long may it continue! **hfb**

To help us in our efforts to protect this industry and benefit from the gold-standard advice we provide, join the HFMA at the earliest opportunity. To learn more about our activities, please contact 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

**50
YEARS**
1965-2015