



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

The morning after...

Well, it has finally happened. Over three years of excruciating stalemate and obfuscation are finally over and we have finally departed from the EU. Whether this means we are now entering a different kind of period of stalemate and obfuscation in our negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with Brussels remains to be seen, but at least we can now move forward from one of the most divisive periods in our recent history.

Despite the obvious concerns about the UK's departure from the EU that are held by many HFMA member companies, ours is also an industry that recognises the opportunities that might be created by Brexit. And we go into the new decade with renewed confidence, built very much around the findings of our new Health of the Nation Survey, which tells such a powerful story.

As we have always said, much of the legislation covering this industry emanates from the European Union, and whilst this has been intended to bring beneficial market harmonisation, in practice, the legislation coming from Europe has often led to disproportionate regulation and restriction of consumer choice and information. So, we hope that over the medium to long-term, there is a real opportunity to look at regulations in a wide range of areas and assess whether the legislation which has been 'imported' from the EU is fit for purpose, or whether the UK's interests would be better served by sensible regulatory reform.

So, hard on the heels of the UK's departure from the EU on Friday, we are now making members, and the industry generally, aware of our new 'manifesto': **'A Healthy Future for Health Foods: Seizing the opportunities of the post-Brexit landscape'**.

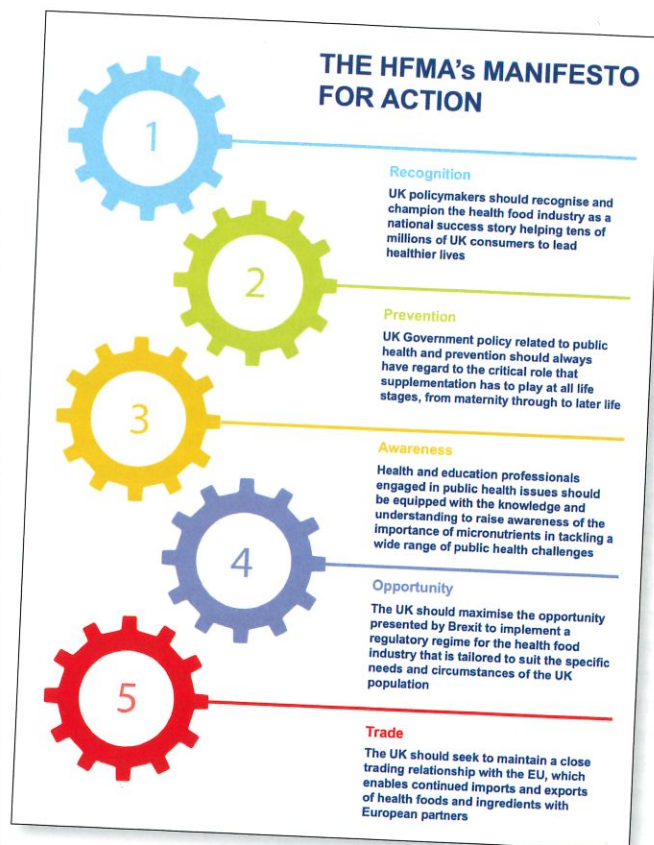
This excellent document talks about this great industry – a national success story – and the vital role it plays in helping our nation to be healthier. It concludes with five key outcomes, in the HFMA's 'Manifesto for action'. We will now be using this document to assist with lobbying Parliamentarians and officials, and all of our members will be able to put it to good use to help promote their company and the best interests of this industry.

Some examples of areas in which we see an opportunity to ultimately create a better system of regulation includes:

- Nutrition and Health Claims reform, including flexibility of wording, descriptors such as 'probiotic' and the approval process for new claims.
- Additives – dealing with the absence of permitted additives for the children's supplement category.
- The regulatory treatment of botanicals food supplements and 'borderline' products.

In what may be the clearest signal yet that my oft-quoted 'Brexit Dividend', i.e. the opportunity to better or more pragmatically regulate ourselves in our national interests, post-Brexit, could come to pass, a recent development relating to one of these issues above caught my attention.

At a recent meeting of industry stakeholders with UK officials, a Department of Health official reportedly stated that DHSC is hoping to get powers to enable them to change UK legislation where they don't agree with the wording of the EU legislation, and gave the permitted additives for children's supplements as an example where they could use their powers. The official also commented that if the relevant EU legislation relating to this issue was published before the end of the transition period, they would be unlikely to enforce



it as DHSC does not agree with the legislation, and would flag this to local enforcement authorities.

At the HFMA, we are now watching developments as closely as ever, in particular, the situation regarding the EU-Exit transition period, and advising our members accordingly. As you can imagine, there are multiple questions relating to issues like tariffs, country of origin labelling, import/export of animal products, organic equivalency standards, the implications for medicines – in particular, Traditional Herbal Registrations (THRs) – trademark registrations etc. And as we get closer to the end of the year, with or without an FTA in place, these questions are likely to grow exponentially.

As we go forward, our European federation, EHPM, will continue to be our eyes and ears in Brussels, and our membership of that organisation remains as important as ever. At a recent meeting of the UK Food and Drink Industry EU-Exit Roundtable, I learned that a good number of significant UK food

industry associations were being required to leave membership of their EU federations as a result of Brexit, including the UK's Food and Drink Federation now having only 'Observer' status within Food Drink Europe.

At last week's meeting of the HFMA Council, it was agreed that the HFMA Chair, Robert Taylor, should send a letter to the members of the board of EHPM, reaffirming our commitment to remain an active member of the organisation we played a key role in creating over 40 years ago. I will be in Brussels in two weeks' time attending meetings, including a key event in the European Parliament, and I am looking forward to being as actively involved as ever. **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 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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INDUSTRY FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS