

BUSINESS FILE

HFMA UPDATE

Martin Last, Director General



Another active year

This year has been an extremely challenging one commercially for many businesses with a tough trading environment to operate in. Historically, healthcare has been immune to such pressures as people have been inclined to look after their health to prevent illness during economic downturns, but since last year, we have also seen pressure on this sector as incomes are more stretched than ever.

It is during this time that support organisations are important for businesses to lean and rely on, and the HFMA continues to support businesses and members with advice and assistance to the challenges faced. The HFMA is strongly engaged at national level with relevant authorities where I and the team regularly attend meetings with UK Government bodies, including MHRA, ASA, FSA, which gives the HFMA continual insight and ability to influence the agenda that continues to emerge. Wherever possible, we engage with consultations that have calls from these authorities to keep our voice and issues heard.

Our political advisors, Cavendish, are active in engagement with key politicians and influencers and developing our key point plan and briefing documents that assist this. This effort has already resulted in key political wins with the 'Not for EU' labelling requirement being all but effectively scrapped, and responses from Government to encourage

ongoing education on folic acid supplementation during pregnancy, alongside fortification of bread with folic acid. New initiatives are being explored to help with ongoing activity with all political parties to raise the profile of our industry in their eyes and to provide a positive and helpful contribution to our nation's health.

After the election this summer, it has been recognised that the new Government has taken time to fully announce its new working schedules, and this has not been helped by no less than three recesses of the full Government since July. But this has not stopped HFMA political engagement activity from proceeding strongly, with parliamentary meetings held with key personnel. It is anticipated in 2025 this engagement will allow continuity on important topics as Government progress.

The HFMA is back to full staffing strength and continue to manage numerous issues members have, not least high-profile attention being given by most agencies and the media to products targeting the menopause and other issues. This has resulted in an uplift to the HFMA CLEAR CHECK services to help members and non-members ensure that product labels and marketing materials are compliant. The implementation of Food Improvement Notices by Trading Standards from October 1, 2024, is anticipated to increase demand for CLEAR CHECK services as our Primary Authority expect

companies affected to fully liaise with the HFMA when they are received. Closer ties to our English Primary Authority have helped develop guidance notes and towards the end of 2024, similar alliances have been established with the Welsh Primary Authority.

Where required, and for specialist advice, we see the role of our Scientific and Technical Advisors giving support and invaluable information to many complex issues. Their expertise helps guide a path for members to mitigate problem areas and improve insight into the issues. At Working Groups, opportunity for members to discuss issues in front of these advisors is a real benefit and next year, we are considering a new venue in central London to accommodate this expanding group.

The HFMA is an influential and authoritative association that is the voice of industry and our membership, and its scope of influence ever widens. There are initiatives affecting the wider industry, where HFMA combine with a common voice to have a stronger presence. With the issues of the setting of maximum levels by the EU Commission, this has not only combined the efforts of our UK tripartite allies such as Committee for Responsible Nutrition (CRN) and Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB), but at European level with the European Federation of Food Supplement Associations (EHPM), Food Supplements Europe (FSE), Food Drink Europe (FDE),

and internationally with the International Alliance of Dietary Associations (IADSA). This support will help to combat the proposal from the EU Commission anticipated early in the new year and other issues.

In addition to my Director General role, I continue to represent the HFMA as Vice President of our sister European organisation, the EHPM, thus extending our influence into Europe. I also chair important groups in Brussels on regulatory, quality, and technical matters, on vigilance, probiotics, Novel Foods and play an active role on the EHPM Board in determining the EU agenda.

The HFMA is extremely active at many levels, which is why it fully represents the interests of membership and contributions from members help shape the discussions we have on numerous and varied topics. I am proud to lead this association and thankful to the dedicated team of staff and Council that support our activities. I look forward to continuing this effort in the new year and to look at how we might expand our horizons and services as we move forward and continue to be proactive in supporting issues that affect industry. And I thank members for their ongoing support of the HFMA. As 2024 closes and 2025 begins, we look forward to tomorrow's challenges and successes.

If you would like to know more about the benefits of membership, visit our website, www.hfma.co.uk, to learn more or contact me on 020 8481 7100.