

# HFMA UPDATE

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## Autumn impact of closer EU UK alignment

**T**he impact of trading with Europe is vital to the UK's economic success and we eagerly follow their developments. No more so when our government issued a Joint Statement reaffirming our shared values and a commitment to deeper cooperation with a new Strategic Partnership between the UK and EU, following the May 2025 UK/EU Summit.

Such an agreement outlines how we would build on the foundations across all core aspects of our relationship with the EC and, specifically for our industry, include discussions on matters such as the Windsor Framework, and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Moving forward, this underlines the importance of regular exchanges between the EU and UK, and the intent for high level meetings to discuss and agree joint strategic interests. These exchanges and negotiations are due to commence from the end of July, and we are already in dialogue with DEFRA on how our position may be viewed.

At the heart of these discussions are considerations around the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement or the SPS. It has already been publicised that changes to this existing agreement would seek to extend to remove Export Health Certificates for animal and plant export. To remove routine border checks on agri-food products and reinstate banned products onto permitted export lists such as fresh sausages, burgers, some shellfish, and seed potatoes. All measures are designed to save businesses cost, time, and paperwork, on exports

to the EU. It will also seek to redress the issues on movement of goods between GB and Northern Ireland to ensure that the same products can be found on shelves across the UK. As a caveat, where it is in the UK interests, it will negotiate a limited number of exceptions to these rules.

On a practical level, closer ties sound positive – an EU agreement without the need for EC membership, however, the devil will remain in the details to be discussed. So far, there has been no indication where the UK will position itself where there are clear divergencies with EU law, nor whether the UK will be able to impact EU strategy from outside the EU and with 27 other member states.

CBD products and the use of titanium dioxide, for instance, are both banned in the EU but permitted in the UK. To align, what position will we adopt, the UK or EU? More importantly, it is clear from our close ties with EHPM and FSE that the EU Commission is trying to impose a model on the setting of maximum permitted levels for food supplements and functional foods, which, if adopted in the UK, would be severely detrimental to our industry.

The EU 2025 model as it stands would result in unwarranted restrictions to otherwise safe, essential, micronutrient food supplements availability and choice. Furthermore, there are concerns here on the EU model as it is not based on generally accepted scientific evidence. In contrast, it adopts a hypothetical approach based on assumptions that are arbitrary



and overly cautious. As such, it does not currently meet with current legal requirements and recent judgements by the EU Court of Justice has clearly stated that maximum levels cannot be established based on hypothetical considerations.

The UK still struggles with persistent cases of nutrient deficiencies as evidenced in the UK's National Diet and Nutrition Survey and which indicates there is a need for supplementation at recommended levels to ensure public health. A need which would be difficult to achieve if the EU 2025 model is applied.

If potential alignment did occur, this could feasibly affect over 400 pieces of food legislation which will require updating to ensure such alignment. One such impact on the use of additives which currently permits production of liquid-based supplements could be in jeopardy if the proposed EU ban of these additives is adopted. The effect of such a move would be, for instance, to severely restrict or prevent the production of supplements recommended by our

government under the Healthy Start scheme. This could then be an unexpected consequence of closer alignment.

This negotiation has a long way to go with many considerations to be discussed, and which is being encouraged by our government to be fast tracked. UK industry is united and prepared to assist in these discussions to achieve the best outcome for our industry and consumers. The progress on this will no doubt be updated when Parliament returns from the summer recess and we will continue to monitor and engage on its progress.

These discussions indicate how the involvement of a strong trade association such as the HFMA provides a vital voice for our industry and to stay ahead of ongoing developments so that we can help coordinate and advise our members to help keep abreast of the many issues we all face. It's what we do.

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