# hfma
**THE VOICE OF THE NATURAL HEALTH INDUSTRY**

**50 YEARS 1965-2015**

# Bulletin Board

## News, information and comment

The voice of the natural health industry

# EU harmonization: a complex situation

The European Union (EU) boasts 28 countries all working together, with the freedom of movement of goods and services across all EU borders and a diverse blend of nationalities and cultures. And yet in legislation the EU attempts to harmonize regulations to produce just a single way to progress with a central, direct influence through the EU governing bodies.

In the many topics that the EU covers, some are clearly easier to legislate on than others; having a single policy on defence, for instance, surely makes sense. Whereas in other areas it is hard to see how such harmonization would truly work. Relating this to the role of human nutrition, how can you harmonize in legislation the nutritional needs of an elderly man in Glasgow with that of a young woman living in Milan?

Watching the workings of the various EU institutions is as fascinating as it can be frustrating. It does bring together a diverse range of opinions, alternative ways to approach an issue and differing

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ways to manage situations. From this comes learning and understanding for all involved, and brings diplomacy and negotiation to the forefront. Where such situations then seek to incorporate these views into a common position, such as in legislation, it becomes a more complex situation. No wonder it isn't always the best outcome for all, and sometimes excellent ideals and intentions can result in clumsy or impractical implementation and interpretation.

The ideal of a single economic market makes common sense, and is one of the cornerstones of the EU internal market, allowing the free movement of goods and services across all mem-

ber states. It should offer businesses the advantage of larger markets, and European citizens a wider choice at lower prices in an open and competitive area. With this has come the ideal of technical harmonization with the intent to remove or reduce barriers that may inhibit such free movement.

As the EU develops we are seeing discussion to simplify legislation. Even as long ago as May 1985 Council Resolution 85/C 136/01 suggested the recasting of technical harmonization to only harmonize the essential requirements of products and apply the "general reference to standards" formula and the principle of mutual recognition to eliminate technical obstacles to the free movement of goods. This appears to make sense, if followed through.

Discussion about the EU is in the media every day and, while there is much political discussion, in this article I offer no opinion, just observation. Suffice to say that discussion will continue, and rightly so.

## News: SACN speaks

The eagerly awaited SACN report on vitamin D last month gave a much-needed reality check to the consumer media about the scale of the vitamin D deficiency in the UK.

Current government advice is that at-risk groups, including children under the age of five, pregnant women, those over 65 and people with darker skin, as well as those who do not expose their skin to sunlight, should take a daily vitamin D supplement.

But if SACN's draft recommendations are adopted by the government, it could lead to new guidance affecting the whole population – a huge vote of confidence for the absolute importance of this nutrient for the prevention of a number of debilitating conditions.

## Getting the best from the HFMA... leading change

In 2015, its 50th year, there has never been a more exciting and important time to become a member of the HFMA. Whilst celebrating this momentous year was important, the HFMA felt that it was equally necessary to strive for further developments within the industry. The micronutrient roundtable brought up some fascinating points on what could be expected for the next 50 years in human nutrition, and the sponsorship of the Health Food Institute's training school ensures that we are helping to equip the health experts of the future with the best possible tools to continue to drive this industry forward in terms of research, development and education.

## NEWS ... LOOKING TO THE NEXT 50 YEARS AS THE VOICE OF THE NATURAL HEALTH INDUSTRY

It's been an exciting and busy time for the HFMA as we celebrate our 50th year as the voice of the natural health industry. One of the most interesting pieces of work surrounding these celebrations included a recent roundtable meeting chaired by Prof Peter Aggett to discuss 'The evolution of UK micronutrient public health recommendations; a review of the past (1965-2015) and a look at future prospects (2015-2065)'.

Discussions focused around: improving use and interpretation of micronutrient DRVs; empowering the health educators; complex-

ity around micronutrient messaging and outreach; promoting healthy environments and settings; public health nutrition; and a history of deficiency.

Following the discussions, the group agreed on five key areas as important considerations for initiatives and efforts to improve future UK micronutrient public health recommendations and advice.

1. To resolve the uncertainties and inefficiencies around how current DRVs are communicated to healthcare professionals and consumers.

2. To identify research areas to enhance the quality of data to inform estimates of DRVs for micronutrients for population groups.

3. Change the amount of knowledge, training and skill-building that is supplied in GP and HCP education, and how nutrition/dietary messages are communicated could increase knowledge for the general public via these professionals.

4. Explore ways by which nutrigenomics, via combining the studies

of nutrition, genetics and epigenetics, can be applied to characterize variability in human requirements and perhaps enable further refinements of DRVs.

5. True behaviour change needs to factor in the influence of the broader environment including the physical environment on successful public health policy both in relation to diet and physical activity.

*The key takeaways and the full report, can be found on the HFMA website.*