



Bulletin Board

News, information and comment

The voice of
the natural health
industry



Securing a future for botanicals

The market for botanical food supplements in the European Union is estimated to be worth approximately €2.1 billion per year. For some time now the existing framework governing how food supplements are labelled, marketed and sold to European consumers is under threat, and there is a risk that over 2,000 health claims currently used on these products will be banned. This is why the Health Food Manufacturers Association (HFMA) in cooperation with the European Federation of Health Product Manufacturers (EHPM) is calling on regulators to support a regulatory framework for food supplements containing botanicals which guarantees the accessibility, safety and quality of products, whilst allowing for the provision of all necessary information to consumers, otherwise known as Option 2.

The botanical food supplement sector requires a fair and proportionate regulatory system which takes into account the long standing use of botanicals in Europe.



Martin Last
is MD of MPL Marketing Services, deputy chair of EHPM and an HFMA board member

The EHPM believes that a specifically tailored regulatory approach should be designed around the three key areas of quality, safety and health claims.

In order to ensure industry best practice in the manufacture of food supplements, any system needs to apply an audit system for manufacturing plants. The EHPM Quality Guide, for example, already provides such a system which is now being endorsed by some member states as a self-regulatory model to adopt, with provision for regular audits.

On safety, the BELFRIT list defined by Belgium, France and Italy could offer a harmonized solution to the management of safety at EU level. This would require further work on the list to take

into account botanicals used in other member states, but the methodology used in developing the BELFRIT list is also consistent with work done by EFSA on botanical safety.

EHPM believes that the assessment of health claims should examine all the available evidence but should not involve the application of medical review standards to foods. EHPM considers that health claims assessment should be structured around the precise and adequate characterization of the botanical within modern technological limits; the collation and evaluation of the available data with a view to establishing whether the claim as stated meaningfully reflects scientific understanding and is understandable to the average consumer.

All options for the future of botanicals will ultimately be decided by the EU Commission, and the EHPM is active in lobbying for a workable regulatory system based around the principles of quality, safety and health claims.

Getting the best from the HFMA

Ahead of the news

With constantly changing regulations, and critics of food supplements coming from far and wide in the national consumer media, it is always vital to stay on top of the news agenda. The HFMA provides its members with an invaluable service which looks into the workings of the UK national press with our daily 'In the News' service.

Last year we reported almost 600 stories to our members, alerting them to negative issues, and on a more positive note, allowing them to leverage positive articles in their own marketing communications. To find out more about the service, go to www.hfma.co.uk.

News...

Milking it

This month it was claimed that one in five UK households have now substituted ordinary milk for a dairy-free equivalent, despite the fact that only 5% of the UK population are believed to be lactose intolerant.

This thirst for alternative milks has been largely driven by the increasingly health-conscious consumer, a better awareness of allergies and interest in labelling, as well as the host of celebrity influencers' endorsements. Combined, these factors saw the free-from foods market rise sharply, as our yearly consumption of dairy-free milk options rocketed from 36 million to 92 million litres between 2011 and 2013.

NEWS ... NUTRITION IN PREGNANCY

It has been a difficult year for pregnancy nutrition education, with the majority of the confusion coming from an unlikely source: the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ). The journal's latest research claimed that multivitamin and mineral supplements for mums-to-be were a needless expense, and that simply improving the overall diet and taking folic acid and vitamin D would give mother and baby all nutrients necessary for a healthy pregnancy.

With the last couple of months following the BMJ

report seeing regular features in the media questioning the certainty of previously well-understood nutritional advice, clarity is now starting to be regained.

Most recently, new advice came from The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which recognized choline as an important nutrient, particularly during pregnancy, and set guidelines for how much we should eat to stay healthy. The nutrient, which has been shown to be important for the development of the central nervous system

of a baby in the womb, has not had a previous EU recommendation because of the assumption of dietary provision, but the EFSA stressed that emerging research has confirmed its importance.

While research and media opinion changes rapidly, it has never been more important for responsible retailers to keep their packaging and messaging up to date and to invest in robust and regular research to benefit consumer education – not just for their own business, but for the whole industry.

www.hfma.co.uk