



Bulletin Board

News, information and comment

The voice of
the natural health
industry



Can we clear up food fraud?

Since 'Horsegate', articles on food fraud have become commonplace, from olive oil and manuka honey to adulterated spices being withdrawn from supermarket shelves.

The manuka honey industry has tried to take control of the 'issue' – an example of which is the fact that more manuka honey is sold in the UK than is being produced in its home country, New Zealand (see *The Great Manuka Honey Swindle in The Grocer*, 28 June 2014).

The New Zealand Government's equivalent of the Food Standards Agency, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), has taken two key steps to clean up one of its core exports:

- 2014: interim guidelines, defining what can be sold in New Zealand
- 2017: manuka definition, detailing the natural chemical markers within manuka honey

The interim guidelines have clarified restrictions on health claims, notably products utilizing rating systems such as 'Active' and 'NPA' are no longer able to be sold in the region and any company selling



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manuka honey must be able to defend its grading system. The marketplace has certainly changed, with retailers predominately only selling products with the known grading systems, like UMF or MG.

The second challenge was to develop a robust definition for manuka honey. The Unique Manuka Factor Honey Association (UMFHA) started a project in 2012 and it has taken five years of research to understand the chemical profile of the nectar derived from the *Leptospermum scoparium* flower, resulting in the UMFHA being able to scientifically classify manuka honey. Recently, the MPI undertook a similar programme lasting three years and it is now consulting with the industry to review the five naturally occurring attributes that may eventually define what manuka honey is.

Another challenge for the MPI to resolve is the use of the name 'manuka honey'. The challenge of protecting the name may be harder to overcome, since defining the science has taken some time and countries have begun to capitalize on the name manuka.

Manuka is an old indigenous Maori name for *Leptospermum scoparium*. Australia also has a *Leptospermum* variety – *Leptospermum polygalifolium* – previously sold as 'tea tree honey' as this delivers a different colour, taste and texture product and, whilst this may not be sold in New Zealand due to import regulations, it is now sold around the world as manuka. The UK has also planted a variety which is labelled as manuka honey.

The MPI finalized its industry consultation on the 23 May with the aim of establishing the definition on the 20 June and it will then be enshrined in New Zealand law. Science has evolved, so maybe food fraud can be legislated against, especially if the MPI guidance is adopted by CODEX in its honey regulations.

Getting the best from the HFMA

A full picture

In an industry whose reputation is dominated by the fast-moving news agenda, it has never been more important to stay in-the-know. For members of the HFMA, this intel comes from a daily 'In the News' bulletin, which delivers updates on the most pressing issues, biggest trends, new product developments and media opinion on the natural products industry.

As the media landscape evolves, members will now be able to access more intelligence than ever, with the introduction of the HFMA's new weekly 'Beyond the News' service covering features and opinion from the world of social media and lifestyle journalism.

News...

The big freeze

In terms of nutrition, there are several ongoing debates that divide opinion. Although specific micronutrient levels in frozen versus fresh vegetables remain a disputed point, new research has revealed that those who regularly stock their freezers with fruits and vegetables eat far more servings of nutrient-rich foods than people who rely on fresh.

The news has been welcomed by nutritionists, who say that the promotion of more easily accessible forms of fruit and vegetable could help to overcome some of the behaviour-change barriers of cost and preparation. Others have claimed that frozen produce could be used alongside supplements to provide nutritional assurance to those millions of consumers who fail to reach their five-a-day, let alone the upper recommendation of ten a day.

NEWS ... CELEBRITY ENGAGEMENT

In a media landscape where product claims have been so heavily regulated that marketing experts can feel at a loss on how to promote natural product benefits, the use of celebrity endorsement is big business.

Long-term celebrity ambassador partnerships have helped turn certain natural products into household names over the years. But the recent spate of reality TV stars endorsing multiple, and often conflicting, brands via social media has meant the industry has faced criticism for promoting

'faddy' products and leveraging false fans.

Katie Price was the latest celebrity to attract criticism from fans when she used a photo from a natural drinks brand on her Instagram page that appeared to imply it was a photo from her home. Protein World has also faced criticism for its controversial Beach Body Ready campaign which made use of multiple models to promote its nutrition brand.

An influx of social media likes/comments may be an enticing prospect for brands keen to extoll

the virtues of their products, but consumers are becoming savvier, and poorly curated posts are being named and shamed in a way that takes them out of the realms of Instagram and into national papers.

High profile natural products fans remain a great endorsement of our exciting trends and new developments, but it remains the responsibility of suppliers, manufacturers and retailers to ensure the endorsements they promote retain the high standards the industry has become known for.