



Bulletin Board

News, information and comment

The voice of
the natural health
industry



Let's make potency count

We spend a lot of time considering the upper safe levels for vitamins and minerals, and the HFMA is an excellent source of information on this subject. But, just now, I'm personally more agitated by the other end of the scale – the miniscule amounts of 'active' ingredients that get listed on many supplement labels.

For me, a food supplement should deliver relevant amounts of nutrients to support someone's normal diet. If the amount delivered is not relevant then I would argue it's not really a supplement at all. In fact, it's not even a food, so it fails on both counts – neither a food nor a supplement!

So what is it? Well, I can think of lots of terms but I'll stick to one of the politest, which is: 'a bit of a swizz'.

The rise of the 'supergreens' products means there is plenty of scope for 'kitchen sink' formulas with lots of ingredients, some of which will be present at low levels. Somehow this seems okay when it is a product which is then scooped out of its container by the user in quite large quantities. And the fact that there might not be much baobab (for example) in the blend



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doesn't really matter. However, when I see tiny amounts of botanical ingredients, or amino acids, listed as ingredients in a tablet or capsule supplement, then I begin to wonder how fair this is on the consumer?

I wonder how many people who see '10mg of organic parsley leaf' on a product label really know just how small that amount is? Isn't it likely that if they could actually see the tiny miniscule speck of parsley leaf that weighs 10mg they might just say 'that's a bit of a swizz'. They may even question the relevance of terms such as 'fresh freeze-dried' if they knew the inclusion rate was the equivalent to a speck of dust!

Of course the truth is that this kind of ingredient 'window dressing' relies on consumers having no real understanding of micrograms or milligrams, whilst being very trusting of the

manufacturer, whom they must assume has only listed ingredients on the label because they are relevant nutritionally.

I know this practice of 'window dressing' is widespread, and few of us are truly innocent, but it seems to me that we are seeing a resurgence of its use. I just think we can all do better than this by focusing more on the fantastic scientific data that shows the powerful health benefits that supplements can bring – even if they don't have any baobab in them!

The first thing we need to be sure about is maintaining a solid foundation for us all to sell our products, and this won't necessarily be an easy task. We want UK officials to avoid taking the easy line by simply cutting and pasting EU food laws, and instead are encouraging them to think about something we call 'cut and paste plus'. This gives an opportunity to adopt what is sensible regulation but, at the same time, corrects some of the examples where this legislation has been so poorly implemented over the years. The action the HFMA is taking now will hopefully lead to a much more sensible and pragmatic approach going forward.

Getting involved in the APPG

As the potential implications of Brexit for our industry remain uncertain, it has never been more important to have a seat at the table when the future of so many businesses are concerned. Being a member of the HFMA gives companies vital representation in discussions in Westminster and Whitehall as the country endeavours to arrive at the best deal possible.

For those wanting an even closer look at the inner workings of the country's political system, every HFMA member has an opportunity to get involved in helping to form strategies in Parliament at the Micronutrients and Health All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

The group, now approaching its fourth meeting, aims to promote awareness and understanding of the vital role of micronutrients in helping people to be healthier, and is supported by MPs including Rosie Cooper, Sir David Amess, Gavin Robinson, Derek Thomas and Dawn Butler.

For more information on the APPG, visit: www.micronutrientsappg.org/

News...

DHA in pregnancy

When a recent study from Australia questioned the benefit of pre-natal DHA supplementation in pregnancy, the HFMA came to the industry's defence to add much needed balance to the debate, emphasizing the large volume of positive research indicating the importance of fatty acids in foetal cognitive development.

The HFMA's defence of the industry was included in the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*, and provided an important measure of balance for consumers confused by conflicting opinions on pre-pregnancy nutrition.

NEWS ... THE DANGER OF OVER-ZEALOUS CLAIMS

The natural products industry receives a fairly bumpy ride in terms of popular media opinion. Week-by-week, food supplements can range from being dubbed life-saving elixirs to unnecessary expenses.

The latest swing of national news opinion was regarding vitamin C, with front pages displaying the headline 'Vitamin C beats cancer'. While the claims made by many were bold, the

research proved less revolutionary as its methodology showed that injecting brain cancer sufferers with a dose 1,000 times higher than the recommended level of vitamin C could target tumour cells and make radiation and chemotherapy more effective.

While this is certainly a significant breakthrough in the realms of oncology-based nutrition, in terms of everyday consumer

understanding of micronutrient claims as part of an average healthy lifestyle, this story does little to further the cause. While a steady stream of positive research helps build confidence in the responsibility of natural products companies, there is an argument to suggest that consumer media has as much responsibility to regulate over-zealous claims as the industry it reports on.