



bulletin board

Can we find a four-leaf clover, or perhaps just make our own luck?

In December 2016 I started an article with the words "If I had a penny every time I heard someone say 'What's going to happen after Brexit', I would have been a millionaire by now!". Given that today the B word still remains the most extensively used word in our daily language and no one is still any clearer on anything Brexit-related, those pennies could have come in very useful by now.

One critical and very topical area inextricably linked with Brexit is Ireland. The Irish market is one of the most important and influential export markets for many UK VMS companies. While having a population of only 4.8 million people, they are very proactive and engaged in their own health, and awareness of the benefits of supplementation is huge. Ireland is also well known for its strong independent health food trade, which is vibrant, growing and equally as positive and engaged as Irish consumers are.

Recently though, we have noticed another side to the Irish



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market, and this comes within the regulatory and legislative arena. Firstly, we had the challenges with the Government and Revenue's decision to impose a 23% VAT charge on all food supplements, due to come into force in early 2019. Then in the last six months, the Food Standard Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has become noticeably more active and is looking into several areas. This includes its long awaited Scientific Committee report on upper levels in vitamins and minerals, about which we have raised concerns, and also its questioning of company notifications for products coming onto the Irish market, relating both to levels of vitamins such as B6 and magnesium, as well as turmeric

and curcumin types, and manufacturing technologies.

The HFMA continues to closely monitor and work on all these issues, often in strong partnership with other leading associations such as Council for Responsible Nutrition and the Irish Health Trade Association. The UK health food industry maintains some of the very highest standards of self-regulation to ensure the safety, quality and efficacy of our products. By working closely with the FSAI to reassure it of this, we hope for an open and transparent relationship to ensure there are no needless restrictions to the availability of UK products on the Irish market.

And of course it goes without saying that we are also looking to our UK politicians to find some collaboration of their own in order to deliver a positive resolution of the current backstop impasse. One thing in this industry I am sure we would all agree on: Ireland is too important for us not to find a practical and workable resolution!

Getting the best from the HFMA

The highest standards

When it comes to the regulatory environment, the natural health industry is challenging and complex. HFMA membership includes favourable rates for the specialist, cost-effective CLEAR CHECK service, which is designed to steer companies safely through the regulatory minefield. Incorporating the areas of copy, labelling, education, advertising and regulation, CLEAR CHECK's Code of Practice administrators have over 50 years of combined experience offering advice to companies seeking help with the complexities of the regulatory environment, and administering the HFMA's Code of Advertising Practice.

News ...

We need more education around fibre

New research commissioned by the World Health Organization has highlighted the widespread lack of fibre in UK diets.

The RDA for fibre is 25-29g a day – although having 30g+ daily is better – but most people in the UK are getting less than 20g, with only one in ten getting what they need for optimum health.

The landmark study revealed that getting enough dietary fibre will cut people's chances of serious health issues including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer dramatically – a serious revelation and a huge blow to trendy 'low-carb' diets that have been widely promoted for decades.

It is vital therefore that there is more education in the UK around fibre's serious health benefits so that people follow diets more akin to the Mediterranean style.

CBD RECLASSIFICATION

The European Commission's U-turn on the classification of cannabidiol (CBD) products as novel foods in its non-binding Novel Foods Catalogue is causing confusion and concern amongst retailers and manufacturers, who have been legally making and selling CBD-based products for several decades.

Rather than consult food businesses on the presence of products on the market before May 1997, as would be expected, the commission announced its new position on CBD as part

of a general update to its Novel Food Catalogue. It does not appear to have consulted with stakeholders as it is required to do, and is seeking to apply what would in effect be a blanket requirement for approval rather than considering products on a case-by-case basis, which is the required approach. It has given no further explanation for this reclassification.

Hemp and hemp-derived products have been used in tinctures and infusions for hundreds of years, and only last year the World Health Organiza-

tion concluded in an authoritative Critical Review Report that CBD is safe.

The HFMA met with Food Standards Agency (FSA) officials to discuss the reclassification in early February and will continue to have discussions with the agency on this issue. It was noted that the FSA does not intend to take unnecessarily proactive or pre-emptive action and will be taking a proportionate approach going forward.

The HFMA will be continuing to advise its members on this issue as it develops.