

HFMA UPDATE

Martin Last, Director General



HFMA serving the industry

A recurrent theme from our Spring AGM was establishing collaborations with likeminded groups to strengthen our UK position, widen the scope of our influence, and add to the expertise of the HFMA. As part of this, I am delighted that our new HFMA partnership with the Global Prebiotic Association (GPA), is proving that such collaboration is supporting members and industry.

The GPA is a USA east coast-based association whose role is to steward and promote the category of prebiotics globally. GPA are actively establishing standards of evidence and conducting consumer research in various markets and to focus on prebiotics. They recently successfully had a monograph approved in Canada instigated by them and have similar projects in Australia and New Zealand. They are also working in China, Brazil, and Korea through their Regulatory, Science, and Technical Committee.

This new alliance recognises that the HFMA and GPA will work together to share information and data, improve access to supplements, and support consistent regulations and standards across international borders. It will also identify opportunities to support research initiatives and educational programmes. By working together, we can promote evidence-based practices, share accurate information with industry professionals and consumers, and raise the profile of prebiotics as a product category in its own right.

This collaboration was made possible thanks to an

HFMA Council member who also sits on the GPA Board and who helped us establish this connection. We are now exploring opportunities for possible trade missions, exhibitions and conferences and other aspects to support favourable trade agreements around the export of supplements across trade borders. Our collaboration with the GPA gives us a significant new partner to support us as an advocate for consistent and realistic regulations, particularly around the use of pre and probiotic supplements, supporting our ongoing discussions at Government level.

This further supports our UK political activity, which is seeking alignment from Government departments that pre, pro and postbiotics etc., are not health claims but should be regarded as mandatory descriptors. Classing the term as mandatory label information removes it from the scope of the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. And there are no negatives, since this does not require any change to UK law; a simple change from our authorities to UK guidance would enable the UK to start to catch up with the EU and other countries, where the markets there are growing in the vital and developing area of microbiome health.

Over the last 18 months, the HFMA has been seeking to break the regulatory blockage cycle in our UK Government in collaboration with all UK and EU trade associations. There have been several high-level meetings with key ministers who are now recognising that this can present an opportunity for



growth and to reduce barriers to trade.

Furthermore, through our political advisors, Cavendish, the HFMA is now issuing an open letter to our Secretary of State for Health to further this initiative to get Government departments to recognise a change to interpretation that will benefit consumers. This open letter has over 50 signatures, including many HFMA member companies, other UK trade associations that operate in probiotics, such as CRN and PAGB, other key stakeholders and associations representing UK food business operators, all which give weight to encourage a meeting with senior officials to help recognise this need.

We are also active with our European partners, the EHPM, who are also lobbying EU ministers and the Commission to recognise the use of probiotics on packaging and promotional material. In recent UK and similar French research, only a small proportion of respondents sees the term as a health benefit, which is often cited to prohibit the use of the term.

Industry's continued efforts in probiotics were set back by the Ombudsman Report last year, where an ill-advised court case brought independently agreed

in favour of the Commission's interpretation. Despite this, industry continues to make the positive case for the use of the terms across all EU states. After all, healthcare professionals recommend probiotics that consumers want to use and due to the current prohibition, consumers can find them on shelf. Consumers in the UK particularly are disadvantaged versus large parts of the EU and most of the rest of the world about the presence of pre, pro or postbiotics on labels of foods in the UK, in direct opposition to the Government's health mission and preventative approach to healthcare.

HFMA believes that these terms should be permitted on qualifying foods and food supplements in the UK. Such a move would remove the ongoing confusion this current interpretation creates to consumers wishing to purchase such products. The HFMA remains active whether to improve member benefits or continue to serve our industry and is an active participant alongside our other UK and EU associations. Increasingly, in a complex global scenario, it is important that there is now firm industry alignment, and the use of effective collaboration with all stakeholders will help to maintain joint industry positions and to have a common voice in all matters, particularly with probiotics, prebiotics, and postbiotics.

If you would like to know more about the benefits of membership to your company, simply visit www.hfma.co.uk, or contact me on 020 8481 7100.