



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

A time of reflection

I am now in my 15th year as the Executive Director of the HFMA, our organisation that I have been so immensely proud to lead. An organisation that has shown time and time again that it will go to the barricades for its members, as we continually strive to raise industry standards and achieve the level playing field we all want in order to enable this great industry to flourish. I and my excellent team of colleagues and special advisers are all focused on this aim with the same level of diligence that our members have come to expect over the years.

I am writing this article in early January 2023, and with this in mind, I have been reflecting back on the previous year and thinking ahead to the challenges expected in the coming one. In these still very challenging times, a lot of the efforts of the HFMA team last year were targeted at helping our members deal with the myriad issues and difficulties thrown up by the post-COVID and post-Brexit environments. We know that this work has been greatly appreciated, as in our recent member survey our members rated our overall handling of COVID and its affects as 89.5 per cent ('Very good' and 'Good') and 92.9 per cent for Brexit and Transition.

Our members still face challenges, in particular, in relation to the movement of goods into the EU, and on a daily basis we continue to provide invaluable assistance and advice. Rising inflation and the increasing costs of goods also remain a significant challenge and the constant threats in relation to the regulatory environment for our sector do not show any signs of easing, and we remain ever-watchful.

This time last year, our members, and this whole industry, were staring into a void that was

ethylene oxide contamination of food supplements, and the resulting threatened mass withdrawals of products from the market (as actually happened in many other European countries). As you may well know, the HFMA sprang into action and led an industry-wide response pushing back to the UK authorities. It would have seemed inconceivable at the time, but here we are one year on and there has not been a single product withdrawal here in the UK as a result, and the issue has now all but gone away. This is a classic example of what we do at the HFMA and, as happens so often, if the HFMA was not on the case for its members, who would be? We act as the eyes and ears for our members, who have come to expect no less from us.

We start the New Year with some welcome news from France regarding the activities in that country, which have mirrored our own here in the UK, in trying to enable a situation where the term 'Probiotic' might be permitted for use on products, and therefore not deemed to represent a health claim for that product. We learned this week from our 'sister' trade association in France, Synadiet, that the French regulatory authority, DGCCRF, has confirmed the

authorisation to use the term 'Probiotics' for the food supplement sector. The DGCCRF recognised that many EU Member States have chosen to no longer follow the position of the Commission, that the term 'Probiotic' was in and of itself a health claim, including the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Italy, Czech Republic, Denmark, and Greece.

So, it would seem that the DGCCRF has recognised that the market in Europe is anti-competitive and has therefore acted to correct this situation in France. They have defined probiotics as 'live microorganisms which, when consumed in adequate quantities, have a beneficial effect on the health of the host by contributing to the balance of the intestinal flora'. It is now authorised for companies in France to use the term 'Probiotics' on the labeling of food supplements as a category name and to associate it with a statement on the balance of the intestinal flora. These arguments for change in France have been a significant part of our argumentation here in the UK for an alternative approach in this market and, needless to say, we will be asking the UK regulatory authority why it should not be taking similar steps here in the UK.

On the wider political front, and with Christmas now a distant memory, what better way to mark the beginning of a new year in politics than with a bit of 'friendly competition'. That's exactly what happened last week when the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, went head-to-head in a battle of New Year's speeches. And whilst the beleaguered Sunak would have been hoping for a positive outcome, and Starmer may have chalked it up as a win, on closer inspection, neither leader covered themselves in glory. Meanwhile, whilst backbench MPs spent the final week of recess in

their constituencies, it was a busy week for members of Sunak's Government, including the Business Secretary, Grant Shapps, who set out his plan to neutralise the impact of strikes on public services, and the Health Secretary, Steve Barclay, who has begun to set out plans to tackle the current issues befalling the health service.

So, Westminster and Whitehall will continue to present challenges but, on the more positive side of things, we start the year with industry stakeholders, including ourselves, being invited to take part in discussions about the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. We have welcomed new legislation to review retained EU law, enabling the UK to develop more bespoke regulation following its departure from the EU. We understand the aim of this exercise is to understand, in relation to Nutrition Labelling Composition and Standards, stakeholders' views in terms of what degree of reform industry might be expecting and how that measures up to what Ministers would agree to and the timetable might allow. We'll see how this develops, but I'm greatly encouraged that we are being consulted and that sensible and pragmatic change may be considered.

We remain truly grateful for the continued support of all of our member companies, and we hope they all feel that the HFMA is being as proactive as ever in working tirelessly to protect, defend and promote their interests. If you would like to know more about the benefits your company can derive from membership, simply visit our website, www.hfma.co.uk, to learn more.

To help us in our efforts to protect this industry and benefit from the gold-standard advice we provide, join the HFMA at the earliest opportunity. To learn more about our activities, please contact me at graham@hfma.co.uk



HFMA membership is vital to ensure that your company keeps abreast of the fast-changing regulatory environment. The HFMA is the UK's best source of information and most effective defender of our industry's interests. To help the HFMA defend your business at this most critical time, contact hfma@hfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

