

PRESS RELEASE

7 May 2019

Workshop on “Probiotics and Innovation”: Over 45 representatives, including Member States’ authorities, stakeholders and the European Commission, attended the Workshop on “Probiotics and Innovation” organized in Brussels by the Permanent Representation of Denmark on 6 May.

The Danish Ambassador, **Per Fabricius Andersen**, welcomed the participants. Bringing together experts, member states and industry, the event aimed to discuss aspects of probiotic use that could be of benefit to European citizens, businesses and national economies.

The probiotics industry is growing fast outside the EU, and significant opportunities exist for further growth, as from the Market Outlook presented by **Esben Laulund, President of IPA Europe**. Some countries have already developed a national approach on probiotics in food and food supplements. Work on the definition and setting of a category to enable the use of the term ‘probiotics’ has meanwhile been initiated by the Codex Alimentarius, with the support of IPA. The term “probiotic” has far from left the minds of consumers, and the interest is increasing in European countries. **“The term is already in the public domain and is not going to disappear” concluded Esben Laulund, “we have to find a way to correctly inform the European consumers. They should not have to turn to the internet for information and only be able to purchase products from outside the EU”.**

While the European Commission concurs that a viable solution should be found, there has been no progress to date. The presentation of **Olga Goulaki (DG SANTE)** was focused on the EFSA procedure of evaluation of a health claim. However, the EFSA has clearly indicated that the term ‘probiotic’ itself does not contain a claimed effect and has suggested to explore alternatives within the current regulatory frame (i.e. a nutrition claim).

The European probiotics industry is committed to developing a positive environment for probiotics in Europe and in defining the probiotics category and the conditions for the use of the term. However, the lack of a proper regulatory environment in Europe clearly has negative consequences for the

¹ IPA Europe is the European chapter of IPA, the International Probiotics Association; it was established in Brussels in 2015. The members of IPA Europe are Companies directly engaged in the manufacture of probiotic cultures or probiotic foods, supplements, nutritional or therapeutic products: BioGaia, Chr. Hansen, Danone, DuPont, IPA, Lallemand, Lesaffre, Probi, Wellingo and Yakult. The IPA Europe mission is: to gain acceptance of the term “probiotic” throughout Europe as a defined category and to create a favourable environment for probiotics in Europe. For additional information on IPA Europe’s activities see: <http://ipaeurope.org>

overall probiotics industry in Europe, as well as on the consumers, who are therefore deprived of the correct information to make informed choices.

This was also confirmed at the workshop by **Sebastian Romero** (*Lawyer*), who also indicated that the term “contains probiotics” fulfils the requirements of the current regulation and should be classified as a nutrition claim, as is the case for other “content” claims (e.g. contains vitamins; contains fiber; contains lycopene).

An example of existing national guidelines in the EU – that regulate the use of the term ‘probiotics’ and allow the marketing of the products – was provided by **Bruno Scarpa** (*Italian Ministry of Health*), who emphasized that strict criteria are included in the national guidance document, which must be complied with, before the use of the term ‘probiotics’ is allowed. However, participants expressed a preference for a solution at European level, i.e. setting up an appropriate regulatory framework, and if necessary, adapting the requirements of the current rules for the use of the term ‘probiotics’.

During the panel discussion, **Sarah King** (*Senior Systematic Reviewer*) presented probiotics from a different angle, and explained the methodology to identify, select, synthesize and summarize evidence from several studies. Findings from systematic reviews are essential to help make recommendations or guidelines for medical and public health interventions. In the case of probiotics, there is evidence of the effectiveness of probiotics in prevention, however consumers need reliable information on which probiotics to take, when and how, and there should be clarity regarding who would benefit most from taking probiotics and under which circumstances.

Following the panel debate, **Robert Madelin** (*Moderator*) summarized that all the participants expressed support for the need to work on a step-by-step solution, as the current EU impasse regarding probiotics is causing a significant decline in the European share of the global market and in innovation. The stakes are even higher than that, because the current EU inaction with regard to probiotics is blocking what could be a helpful link between probiotic use, prevention and consumer information.

This press release, as well as the IPA Europe presentation held at the Workshop, can be found on our website: www.ipaeurope.org

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