

Health benefits and health claims of probiotics: bridging science and marketing

In Summer 2011, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has completed the evaluation of all health claims based on generally accepted scientific evidence (so-called article 13.1 claims). It is fully acknowledged that it is necessary to have a better regulation in this area in order to protect the consumer's interest and the truthfulness of the claims. So far, none of the claims related to the benefits of probiotics received a positive opinion of EFSA, despite the extensive experimental and clinical research in this area.

How could the preparation of the dossiers be improved? What can we learn from and how can we build on the opinions of the European Food Safety Authority? What needs to be done to bridge the gap between scientific and marketing of probiotics?

An attempt to answer these questions has been made by a panel of six renowned European scientists and practitioners: Ger T. Rijkers, Willem M. de Vos, Robert-Jan Brummer, Lorenzo Morelli, Gerard Corthier and Philippe Marteau. The outcome of this brainstorming is presented in a recently published article "Health benefits and health claims of probiotics: bridging science and marketing" (British Journal of Nutrition (2011), 106, 1291–1296) which identifies gaps to fill and inherent difficulties of this research area.

The authors conclude that **"The substantiation of health benefit of probiotics into health claims that are approved by regulatory authorities and understood by the consumers is a joint responsibility of scientists, regulatory authorities, food and nutrition industry and consumers"**. Thus all parties involved - academia, regulators, food producers and consumers - should join forces to establish solutions, which would make it possible to translate scientific discoveries into palpable consumer benefits. As stated by the authors, **"An open dialogue and reaching consensus on a list of validated biomarkers for immune and gut health could be a first step in this process"**.

Major viewpoints expressed in this article had already been discussed during the workshop on Probiotics and the basis for the substantiation of gut and immune health claims held in Brussels on March 2010. The executive summary of this workshop as well as video recording of the discussions could be consulted on the website of the European Food and Feed Cultures Association: www.effca.org/probiotics.

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About EFFCA

The European Food & Feed Cultures Association - EFFCA - was formed in 1992 with the objective of enhancing public knowledge of the use of microbial cultures within the food chain through accurate, fair and scientifically based information. EFFCA represents sixteen manufacturing companies accounting for more than 95% of the microbial food cultures, including probiotics, sold in Europe.