



## Focused and active for 2018

In a regular column for **Health Food Business**, the IHTA's Phil Costigan highlights the priorities for the organisation as we move into 2018.

No more out with the old and in with the new...it's more of the same really!

Firstly to our readers, *Athbhliain faoi Mhaise Daoibh*, may 2018 bring much joy and contentment to you all. The ending of one year with the arrival of a new one, seems to prompt us to not only to review the past 12 months, but to welcome and embrace the opportunities now open to us with a brand new start.

For the Irish Health Trade Association, 2017 presented trials and gains in our endeavours to safeguard the environment within which our members carry on their businesses. Some core activity will carry on from 2017 and continue to hold our focus well into 2018.

We have expended sizeable time and funds in our efforts to keep at bay the eroding of the Zero VAT rate applying to food supplements. At date of writing this column, we continue with our dialogue and negotiations with Revenue, we do not intend to slow down in 2018, all possible routes will be pursued in our drive to safeguard the interests of our members supplying supplements to the national market.

*"With hands across the water"* BREXIT is a topic of interest to all sectors doing business within the EU and the natural health industry is no exception. Major national agencies ran information days and provided guidance throughout the year. In April, Europe's top CEOs in food and drink gathered in Dublin for a FoodDrinkEurope board meeting to call for a comprehensive free trade agreement between the EU27 and the UK post Brexit. Food Drink Ireland (FDI) produced a position paper titled "Brexit - the exceptional case for state aid supports for the food and drink sector". In addition, Bord Bia provided businesses with a Brexit Barometer, and the Health Products Regulatory Agency (HPRA) also ran a Brexit Information Day. If, in March 2019 the UK becomes a 3rd country, it will nonetheless be business as usual for the HPRA. In relation to an influx of authorisation transfer applications, the HPRA advised that they have the capacity and resources to ensure a competent response service. The IHTA has held talks with both the HPRA and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) identifying our concerns on behalf of our members.

I think readers will agree that in relation to Brexit it's a wait and see scenario...however in relation to what we do know... readers may be interested to learn that in a survey produced by Eurostat to mark World Health Day in April, it emerged that within the EU, Ireland (84.2%) had the third highest share of people aged 25 to 64 who perceive themselves to be healthy or very healthy only marginally behind Cyprus (85.0%) in top place and Greece (84.7%) in second place. Sounds positive until one learns that the older population may not be doing so well. Researchers from Trinity College Dublin have discovered that one in eight adults over the age of 50 living in Ireland are vitamin D deficient (<30 nmol/L). The research shows that deficiency increases with age, and is more common in smokers, people living alone, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Vitamin D deficiency is an all European issue, in fact what we term the "vitamin D winter" increases with latitude; it lasts about 3 months in Greece, rising to 6 months in Ireland and the UK (both at 51°N) and up to 7-8 months in Nordic countries. For decades, our industry has been providing information on Vitamin D deficiency and supplying products to consumers, is positive to see policy makers now taking note. In September, an international scientific conference titled "Vitamin D & Health in Europe: current and future perspectives" was hosted by the Cork University Centre for Vitamin D and Nutrition Research. The aim of the conference was to update participants on the current vitamin D research in Europe, particularly in relation to the central theme on vitamin D deficiency prevention.

So with the arrival of 2018, it does seem to be more of the same and that includes the IHTA's commitment to stay vigilant, focused and active in safeguarding the environment within which our members carry on their businesses.

Phil Costigan is General Secretary of the Irish Health Trade Association (IHTA), which represents the interests of manufacturers, importers and distributors of natural health products in Ireland. The principal aim of the IHTA is to assist member companies in promoting the wellness of all people in Ireland. For more information on the IHTA, visit [www.ihta.org](http://www.ihta.org)