



Policy Notebook

Regular updates and analysis from leading political affairs commentator Chris Whitehouse

Be a local campaigner for natural health – and boost your business!

We all make hundreds of choices every day, at times without even realising it. At home, at work, out with friends, our choices are based on information we have and that which we are able to collect from multiple sources. The more important a choice is for us, the more we want to collect sufficient information before making a decision.

The food we eat on a daily basis is obviously a very important component of our lives, and most of us want to make sure that our diets are balanced and healthy. With plants – and products derived from them – being the single most important group of foods we eat, this is an area where consumers welcome the fact that they can rely on easily accessible information.

This makes it all the more worrying that in future it is likely to be much harder for us to obtain information about plant and botanical nutrition products. Since December 2012, the information which consumers can find on food labels, including dietary supplements, has been severely limited by the rules imposed through the EU's Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation (NHCR).

The implementation of this legislation has seen many health claims disappearing from the labels of hundreds of popular food products since they are not on the small list of claims approved by the European regulator for the sector. Strikingly, no botanical ingredients are on this list, as EU policy-makers decided in 2010 that their assessment should be suspended, with no deadline for the final assessment in sight.

While health claims for botanical ingredients continue to be used on labels in the meantime, there is a very real risk that consumers will be prevented from being informed about the beneficial effects of thousands of popular botanical food products and supplements.

Independent consumer organisation Consumers for Health Choice (CHC), of which I am director of strategy, believes consumers have the right to access a wide range of natural health care products including vitamin and mineral supplements, herbal remedies, fish oils and other health foods.

CHC believes consumers need more information about the food they consume, not less, and will continue making its case in the UK and in Europe. This will be the key theme of my presentation at camexpo 2013. The focus will be on retailers, as it's these knowledgeable, well-informed individuals who are best placed to tell consumers about the looming EU threat, but everyone should come along to learn more about CHC's activities, including the Save Our Supplements campaign that focuses on preventing EU plans to force through a ban on higher potency vitamins and mineral supplements.

• **Chris will deliver 'Be a local campaigner for natural health choice – and boost your business!' as part of the Natural Products Live conference on Sunday 6 October at 2pm**

Follow Chris on Twitter at @ClrWhitehouse.



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