

PRESS RELEASE

“Probiotics in Europe – How can better regulation strengthen the knowledge of probiotics for consumer health?”

EURACTIV online conference

26th April 2023

9.5 billion of probiotic sales in Europe, and billions of consumers looking for probiotics. The virtual conference on 24th April 2023 “Probiotics in Europe – How can better regulation strengthen the knowledge of probiotics for consumer health?” was attended by 233 people and featured an opening debate on the science of probiotics, the lack of regulation and how greater clarity can benefit the European industry while providing better information and transparency to consumers.

Some of the very sound recommendations from the speakers:

- To ensure an EU single market functioning: sharing of “best practices” used so far from the Member States where the term ‘probiotic’ is allowed and to work on a proposal of guidelines to be adopted by all MSs, before moving to a regulation (based also on existing industry guidelines and definitions – IPA, ISAPP and WHO/FAO 2001 definition)
- The tremendous amount of scientific work on probiotics should be taken into account
- There is a need for an update on the EU Commission’s position (from 2007): to go towards the harmonisation of the situation in the European market will help consumers’ choices and will answer consumers’ interest in probiotics.

Mariam Zaidi, the moderator of EURACTIV, introduced the topic and the speakers: Lasse Hamilton Heidemann, Member of the Fit4Future Platform and Member of the Danish Chamber of Commerce; Danai Spentzou, Representative of the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Stelios Kypouropoulos; Naomi Venlet, Scientific Project Manager, ILSI Europe; Esben Laulund, Chair at International Probiotics Association- Europe.

Probiotics are popular, “the genie is out of the bottle” as Esben said, the word probiotics is in the public domain, and the industry would like to have clear rules, in the interest of both producers and

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, and nutritional or therapeutic products in Europe. 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.

consumers. Today there are discrepancies between a few large markets and the more restrictive practices of other countries: this increases costs for the producer and goes against the functioning of the European single market. It also makes it difficult to provide the right information to consumers.

Today the different practices can be confusing for European consumers. Lasse presented the conclusions of the [recent opinion on 'Biosolutions'](#) addressed to the European Commission by the High-level expert group. The opinion- in suggestion 8 - states that a comprehensive dialogue about using the word “probiotic”, “would ensure better legal certainty and better information to consumers about the products they are interested in”. He concluded that, in the absence of a European frame, member states are making their own rules. As a result, even though it was not the intention of the EC, this fragmentation runs counter to the European industry's desire for a level playing field, but also fails to meet the general requirement that consumers should not be misled.

Producers cannot use the word “probiotic” in communication, but consumers can find products online. On the scientific side, it was acknowledged by the participants that there is a long history of research on gut microbiota and a lot of studies on probiotics over the past decades. For Naomi, the consumer does not have the right information to make the responsible choice: providing additional information, for example with scientific references, can help. The [ILSI Monograph](#) published on the 31st of January 2023 was intended precisely to make a piece of scientific information accessible to the broader public.

Danai Spentzou representing MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos reminds the role of yoghurt and fermented milk in diet: these products are traditionally used in some countries. She also added that recent developments in mental health are very important and that this is a good time to discuss a better regulatory approach in the EU: reconsider the old EC guidance, bring the topic to the attention of the European Parliament and members states, and hopefully work on this topic with the new European Commission in 2024.

To conclude on a positive note, all the participants were wishing to continue a dialogue with all the actors - industry academics and public authorities - to create clarity that can benefit the European industry while providing better information and transparency to consumers.

Find [here](#) the recording of the EURACTIV conference.

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