

IADSA CONNECT

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Levelling up the Chinese supplement sector

POST-PANDEMIC HEALTH
CHALLENGES IN TURKEY

ČASP CULTIVATING PRODUCTIVE
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

#09

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Simon Pettman,
Executive Director, IADSA

WELCOME TO IADSA CONNECT

Dear Members

We feature in this issue of Connect, one of our longest member associations, ČASP of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and our newest member association, CNHFA of China. Both organisations are focussing heavily on ensuring good regulation and policy through partnership with government. In addition, we hear from Gulden Pekcan, one of Turkey's leading scientists, who provides her perspectives on the important role of nutrition in the post-pandemic world.

Simon Pettman
Executive Director



MADE IN CHINA: HOW GOVERNMENT-INDUSTRY CO-OPERATION IS LEVELLING UP THE CHINESE SUPPLEMENT SECTOR

Tracy Li of the China Nutrition & Health Food Association tells Connect how businesses and regulators are working together to ensure product safety and encourage innovation.

The China Nutrition & Health Food Association (CNHFA) was formed in 2015, with support and assistance from the Chinese government's State FDA, today called the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR). CNHFA has grown quickly and now has approximately 350 members, including all of China's major health supplement manufacturers.

CNHFA's Executive Vice-President is Tracy Li, who has been with the association since 2016. She was previously employed by the government, which means she has experience of both sides of the regulatory equation. She says that CNHFA has evolved to become a "bridge" between industry and government, improving communication channels and developing a mutual understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in China's supplement sector.

“SAMR is responsible for controlling the supplements market,” Li explains, “but safety is a question for everyone, including businesses. CNHFA is a very good platform to connect all the different stakeholders. But it’s not only about safety. Encouraging innovation is also very important, so we can develop the Chinese supplement sector at home and internationally.”



Tracy Li, Executive Vice President,
China Nutrition and Health Food
Association (CNHFA)

CNHFA was able to demonstrate its value recently when it worked with SAMR to add five ingredients to China’s positive list of raw materials, which previously included only essential vitamins and minerals. Any raw materials on the list, which was introduced in 2016, can be used in supplements through a filing procedure that is faster and less complex than the registration process required for any ingredients that are not on the list.

The new additions to the list were co-enzyme Q10, melatonin, fish oil, Ganoderma lucidum spore powder, and spirulina. Their inclusion was made possible in large part by the efforts of CNHFA to liaise between its members and SAMR to compile the necessary documentation and co-ordinate regular meetings to discuss the change and what it would mean for supplement businesses.

Li says CNHFA hopes it will in time become easier to add more raw materials to the list – noting that it took about three years for the five to be added. “We want the positive list to grow every year,” she says, adding that it will help companies in the Chinese supplement sector to become more innovative.

CNHFA is currently undertaking a major research project to explore regulatory systems for health supplements in Korea, Japan and Singapore. “We want to start a discussion about how our neighbours are doing things,” Li says. “They are similar markets with a similar culture.”

Another priority is function claims. Only 24 are currently allowed in China and the industry believes there is scope for more to be approved, provided the scientific substantiation can be demonstrated. The good news for CNHFA and its members is that the Chinese government and SAMR appear to share the same vision. “The government has two priorities,” says Li. “The first is safety; the other is to promote the industry.”

CNHFA believes that more freedom to make function claims, as well as an expanded positive list, would help to elevate the status of China’s supplements sector both domestically and globally. “Our analysis shows that we export a lot of raw materials and commodity supplement products,” Li explains. “We want to change that. We want ‘Made in China’ to become recognised for high quality and identifiable brands.”





Professor Gulden Pekcan,
Lecturer at the Hasan Kalyoncu
University Faculty of Health
Sciences Department of
Nutrition & Dietetics, Gaziantep

LIFE AFTER LOCKDOWN: TURKEY FACES SIGNIFICANT HEALTH CHALLENGES IN THE POST- PANDEMIC WORLD

Professor Gulden Pekcan is a lecturer at the Hasan Kalyoncu University Faculty of Health Sciences Department of Nutrition & Dietetics in Gaziantep. Here she explains how COVID-19 has exacerbated Turkey's obesity crisis.

Turkish nutrition scientist Professor Gulden Pekcan is worried about the wellbeing of her compatriots. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the lockdowns that ensued, have exacerbated existing health problems in Turkey, she says. As a result, levels of obesity will be on the rise, fuelled by social inequality, economic hardship, poor nutrition and physical inactivity and lockdown restrictions.

"During the pandemic, we've been locked down in our homes," Professor Pekcan explains. "We have not been allowed to go out. Consequently, people in Turkey are leading more sedentary lives than ever, trying to be more conscious on choosing more hygienic and healthier foods and food supplements. We are sleeping longer, watching more television, sitting in front of our computers, teaching in digital platform, and snacking more between meals."



Professor Pekcan is one of Turkey's leading experts on nutrition. As well as holding a senior position at Hasan Kalyoncu University in Gaziantep, she has been a member of several advisory committees and councils for national programmes, government departments, and NGOs. In addition, she is a member of the Advisory Committee of the Turkish Ministry of Health on nutrition programmes, and scientific member of the Food Supplements Commission and national Codex Commission of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Her professional expertise means there are few people better placed to understand the crisis now engulfing Turkey. Many people were put out of work or unable to work in the pandemic. Economic pressures have pushed health and nutrition further down the list of priorities for many families. Consumption and sales of processed foods high in sugar, salt and fat have risen.

Professor Pekcan is herself an advocate for, and a regular user of, supplements. She would like the Turkish government to be more proactive in educating consumers about their benefits, and even consider subsidising their cost so they are more affordable. She believes that consumers would be receptive to improved nutrition information. "During the pandemic people have really come to understand the value of science and health," she says.

At a time like this, she argues, the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals have never had such an important role to play. Inequality must be addressed, in terms of income, gender and, of course, health. "Lifestyles have changed," she says. "When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, we will face another pandemic – a pandemic of non-communicable diseases related to unhealthy nutrition and sedentary lifestyle."

It's a stark and sobering warning. But coming from such an expert as Professor Pekcan, it is certainly one that is worth heeding.



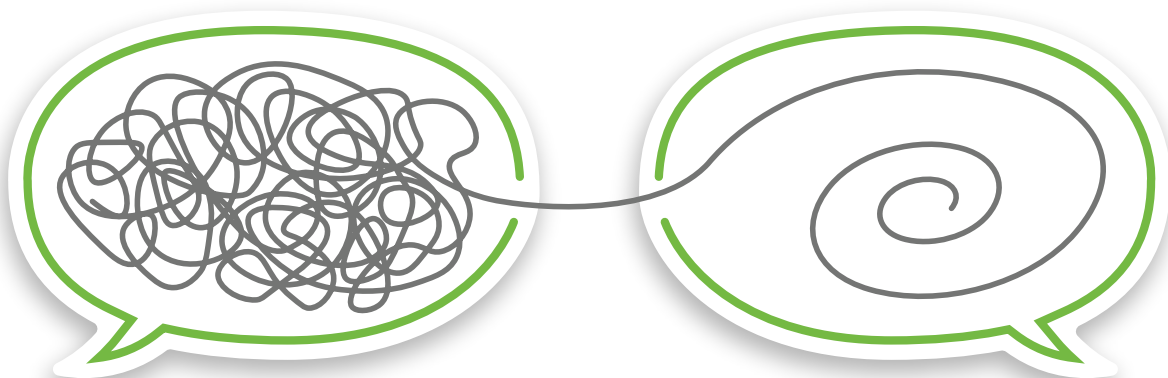
Martina Šímová, President, Česká Asociace pro Speciální Potraviny (ČASP)

CZECH MATES: HOW ČASP HAS CULTIVATED A PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

Martina Šímová is President of ČASP, the association for the Czech and Slovakian supplement sectors. Here, she explains to Connect how ČASP's members are benefitting from a good rapport and constructive dialogue with government.

Established in 2000, Česká Asociace pro Speciální Potraviny (ČASP) is the food supplement association for the Czech Republic and – for a year now – neighbouring Slovakia, too. It has 21 full members, who are manufacturers and distributors, and it operates at the national and EU levels – as well as internationally through its membership of IADSA.

Sales of supplements in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are in good shape. They were already rising before the COVID-19 pandemic, says ČASP President Martina Šímová. But they have been given a further uplift in the past 12 months or so as Czech and Slovakian consumers have become more interested in immune health as a result of the coronavirus crisis.



There was a boost in particular for Omega 3 and vitamin D, which were both recommended by the Czech Ministry of Health last year as nutrients important for helping to prevent infection and protect the body against the effects of COVID-19. While officials didn't recommend supplements as a source of these nutrients, inevitably many people turned to them as the most convenient way to obtain them from the diet.

ČASP and its members enjoy a strong working relationship with the Czech government, which has been nurtured over many years. The association has a constructive partnership with the Czech Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for regulating the supplement sector.

This relationship is mutually beneficial and is helping the category thrive within a regulatory environment that, in general, strikes a balance between protecting consumers and allowing reputable companies to thrive. "This approach reflects the government's general desire to ensure that the products on the market are safe for consumers," says Šímová. "The regulators trust ČASP, and they value our suggestions for ensuring this is the case."

The Czech authorities are currently preparing to publish, as guidance, a list of botanical ingredients approved for use in supplements, which took as its starting point the BELFRIT list. This takes its name from the three countries that collaborated to draw it up – Belgium, France and Italy. It was developed in an effort to create a degree of certainty in the context of the current impasse within the EU over the harmonisation of regulations for botanical extracts. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Czech enforcement agency are set to post the Czech list on their official websites as a point of reference for the industry.

Šímová believes this will provide greater certainty for manufacturers of botanical supplements, removing the grey areas that currently exist. It will also be helpful for enforcement officers on the ground, who work in a number of consumer goods categories and are not experts in supplements specifically. "The list will be a very good guidance document for everybody," she says.

Besides immune health, growing categories in the Czech and Slovakian supplement markets include probiotic supplements and supplements for kids. Probiotics have withstood the challenge posed by the absence of EU-approved health claims for the category. The market has been helped by the Czech government's decision to join a handful of EU countries and allow products to be labelled as probiotics, making it easier for consumers to identify them in-store.

A priority for ČASP is to work with the Czech and Slovakian governments to explore the potential for healthcare cost savings as a result of wider and more regular supplement use. However, with the pandemic continuing to pose problems, Šímová accepts that the present time is not the right moment to push this agenda, so it remains one for the future. The indications are that, when this time comes, ČASP will find that the government is willing to listen.



