

Forty Years On

By Maurice Hanssen, President, The HFMA

I was one of a group of concerned manufacturers led by the dynamic red haired Irishman, Jimmy Lee Richardson, who had been meeting to debate our increasing concerns over second rate products with wild claims damaging the credibility of health foods. I was sitting in my Colnbrook office in the summer of 1965 with my advertising agent, Ken Rusby, planning a campaign to promote Delicia canned meatless meals when the phone went. It was Jimmy saying that we now had the funds to start a new association and everyone wanted me to be the Chairman.

I was 33 years old and delighted to accept the challenge, As I put the phone down, I turned to Ken and asked him to become, without payment of course, the first Secretary, a job he held for the next 25 years.

In that first year we recruited over 60 members, established a Constitution and began to create standards. I was Chairman for the first three years and in that term we established strong relationships with Parliamentarians, the DHSS and MAFF. We also had our first political battle with DHSS over the 1968 Medicines Act which was threatening the very existence of many herbal medicines. We started a Consumer group, The National Association for Health under Labour MP, Joyce Butler with the most prolific and best loved romantic author in the world, Barbara Cartland, as President. Jimmy's successful Here's Health magazine trumpeted the cause for freedom encouraging consumers to write what they felt to the DHSS.

We worked closely with our excellent sister organisation, the British Herbal Medicines Association. We all went into action. Before the days of computers thousands of complaining letters showered onto the desks of officials and MPs. The Ministry could stand it no longer. The senior civil servant involved, Raymond Tringham, called me to his office to say that the D of H was being ground to a halt. "Can you call them off?" He asked, "Yes, if you do a deal," and so Section 12 (2) of the Act was included whilst the BHMA succeeded in safeguarding practitioners with 12 (1).

After three invigorating years as Chairman, I was asked to carry on. I said "No, if we are to maintain vitality at the centre, we need a regular change of leader, not a monopoly." So they made me President with special responsibility for overseas relationships, to be elected annually, which they have kindly done ever since.

We started an annual residential training course for retailers called REMTEC, where the leading producers and experts explained their sectors. The food was vegetarian, mostly produced by HFMA members, with the original packs on the tables. It was successful and also created warm, enduring and positive bonds of friendship with the retailers.

Exhibitions were mounted in conjunction with the retailers, first REMCON and then Helfex. I chaired many of them and we created real enthusiasm in the earlier years because we were more a health movement than a business, we had a mission to

provide the means to good health, at a profit, but not as the only motive.

In 1972 I wrote about the Common Market:-

“If we are to maintain our freedom to sell an assortment of health foods and medicinal products, proposed legislation will need to be modified and it is almost certain that in the next ten years the pattern of trading will be changed and we will have to increase our expertise if we are to maintain a strong position in a specialist world.”

And we are still all energetically engaged on the same process!

We were working on legislation with the GEAMR, the European Retailers Association and I was treasurer. Sadly this group has now run out of energy. We were trying to build exports and had HFMA exhibitions in the Netherlands, France and Germany where their Director, Dr Rudolf Lamsfuss, said “We have spent fifty years growing a beautiful apple tree, who are you British to come and steal our lovely apples!”

So I resolved to form the EHPM, the European Federation of Health Product Manufacturers’ Associations. Neville Kirby and I met the head of the German Association, Dr. Klaus Hancken in Amsterdam and we finished the Constitution at around 3.00 am. We then invited the other Associations to come and join us. A consensus is so much easier with two!

I became President and Germany, soon with Wolfgang Reinsch as their executive, provided the secretariat. It is now a most influential group, based at the centre of power in Brussels with a new Chairman every three years and, yes, I am still President and we have 26 members.

1978 was a great leap forward for the HFMA. The passing of the Advertising of Medicines to the Public Regulations that year gave us the opportunity to have an officially recognised Code of Practice to vet members advertising and labelling. I recruited the wonderfully effective Dr Adrienne Mayes who answered a postcard in the Post Office window, to run it. This she did until 1994. Now called LAPAD, our team of Gwyneth Dicks and Jenny Akers continue to provide an exemplary service and are a cornerstone of our service base.

Soon after starting, Adrienne and I became alarmed at the high levels of nutrients in some supplements. We doubted they were safe and food has to be safe. So the concept of upper safe levels was born. Our work was scientifically supported firstly by Professor André McLean and then definitively by Dr Derek Shrimpton whose work has helped us take the system to the world in Codex and to the EU in the Supplements Directive. We cooperated with PAGB, CRN and MAFF who all contributed to the work with scientific funding from CRN.

Professor David Richardson is now leading the science in the UK with help from Dr John Hathcock of the US CRN and Dr Michele Sadler of the HFMA. The extremely complex technical issues were managed by Peter Berry Ottaway and then Michael Evans with great skill and insight.

HFMA celebrated 21 glorious years on 6th May 1986 with a luncheon under the

Chairmanship of Colin Tophill at the Burnt Stub Mansion at Chessington. Many distinguished past and future Chairmen were present including Roger Lane, John Peet, Neville Kirby, Denis Bowley and David Hampson. Our latest recipient of the HFMA's Award of Honour, Brian McLoughlin attended before he became our longest serving Treasurer. Within weeks the Burnt Stub was reduced to ashes but the HFMA went on from strength to strength.

In 1996 the HFMA Council came to the conclusion that although we were unquestionably effective, the rapidly increasing legislative workload meant that we needed to be far more professional. I had the idea of inviting our then Chairman, Penny Viner, who ran Weleda, to take on the task and to our general delight she accepted. So the modern HFMA was born.

Penny was famously successful and retired in August 2003 leaving a first class organisation behind for our present Director, David Adams to inherit and put his own stamp on.

1998 saw, with the founding of IADSA, the globalisation of supplement organisations. This International Alliance of Dietary/Food Supplement Associations comprises 50 member associations representing every continent. Both HFMA and CRN represent the UK. IADSA is a powerful voice at Codex and works internationally, like ourselves, to achieve freedom of sales through quality, safety and credibility. I have been one of the European representatives on the Executive since the beginning and am encouraged that the future will be the stronger for all of us.

Forty years on I look back with pleasure on the enjoyment of working with like minded friends from many associations in all parts of the world to achieve our worthwhile objectives. I look forward to contributing for so long as I am both able and useful in our unending and usually warm and creative relationships with law makers and enforcers, many fine scientists, the media in all its manifestations, our consumers and with my real and my extended family – those of you who celebrate with us. The HFMA is in strong hands.

Maurice Hanssen 7th June 2005